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NOV $3.95 US $4.95 CAN £2.95 UK

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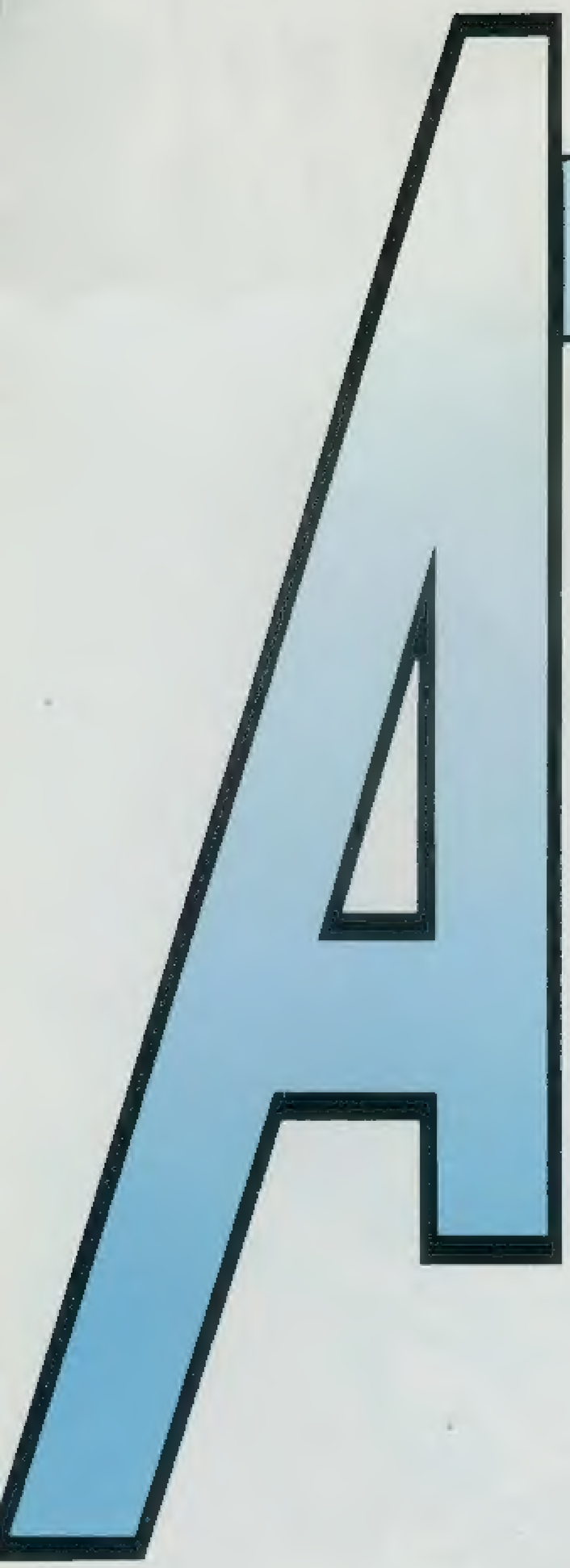

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EDITORIAL

It blew my mind.

I had begun reading **THE AVENGERS** with issue #9 (by sheer coincidence, the same month I had begun reading **THE X-MEN** — with an Avengers guest shot). In #9, the team consisted of Iron Man, Captain America, Thor, Giant Man, and the Wasp fighting Zemo, the Executioner, the Enchantress, and the new (and ill-fated) powerhouse Wonder Man. The bad guys really didn't stand a chance. With a lineup like the Avengers had, it seemed as if there was no menace powerful enough to take them on! Even the Kang-engineered Spider-Man robot in issue #11 was no match for their might.

Then I picked up issue #16 and found that Stan and Jack had solved the power problem. They *replaced* just about the entire team! The Avengers lineup — Captain America, Quicksilver, Scarlet Witch, and Hawkeye — had become vastly less powerful. In the process, the level of dramatic tension had become vastly greater.

I was boggled. I was hooked. I haven't missed an issue since. And over the years, through the ups and the downs, through the epics and the inventory stories, **THE AVENGERS** has remained my favorite title.

I think it's the character interaction and the comraderie that have kept my attention the entire time. I was astonished that Hawkeye, still the hothead of the group, could be so bloody rude to Captain America. I was incensed, along with Hank (Goliath) Pym, at the racism of the Sons of the Serpent. I was impressed, along with Thor, at the sheer power exhibited by Iron Man in the assault on Michael's headquarters. And, like all readers, I found that when Captain America talks, everyone listens.

I won't claim that every **AVENGERS** issue has been a masterpiece. There have been stinkers. But I've always been confident that there were new masterpieces around the bend. And I must say that Bob Harras, Steve Epting and Tom Palmer have proved me right. Their current run on the **AVENGERS** is among the best I've ever read.

Why? The answer is mysteriously intangible. (If it weren't, every issue *would* have been a masterpiece.) It's just that the Harras/Epting/Palmer team seems to have tapped into the strange source of inspiration that has struck some of the best creative folks in comics throughout Avengers history.

Ever the fact-seekers, those of us who put together this anniversary celebration have endeavored to ferret out the truth by examining many of the facets of the Avengers legend. What makes the Assemblers unique? How do those elements relate to the World's Mightiest Heroes today? Hopefully, we've answered some of the questions, and helped you, the reader, draw your own conclusions.

At the same time, we've looked at where that legend is going, in particular the ramifications that will shoot off from the Avengers/X-Men crossover, and from the catastrophic (and fatal) events unfolding helter skelter over in **AVENGERS WEST COAST**. The current and future creative teams seem fixed on the idea that there be no rest, no complacency in store for Avengers readers.

The goal seems to be that the first thirty years was just a warm-up. Fine by me.

—Steve Saffel
Editor, **MARVEL AGE**

Bob Harras — Tom Palmer — Dave Ross/Tim Dzon — Colorists/Letterers

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THE DREAM

They're the best at what they do, and what they do is avenge.

The 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona showcased, for the first time, America's greatest basketball players. Larry Bird, Magic Johnson, Michael Jordan and nine others, the cream of both collegiate and professional level play, were joined together for a cause, to recapture America's Olympic gold in basketball. The rest of the world never stood a chance.

In 1963, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby brought together the elite of the Marvel Universe. Iron Man, The Incredible Hulk, Thor, Ant Man and the Wasp banded to stop the evil god of mischief, Loki. After the battle, these five, "Earth's Mightiest Heroes," joined for a cause — to defend the planet from threats too big for any individual member. Evil would never stand a chance.

The Avengers are one of Marvel's premier groups. Along with The Fantastic Four and The X-Men, the team spans three decades. Each group has faced numerous super-powered dangers, taken part in galactic confrontations, saved the planet many times and dealt with its own inner turmoil. Yet the Avengers are different. They seem to have a "mystique," as the book's editor Ralph Macchio put it, that pervades the group and its members, and affects the entire Marvel Universe.

What is this mystique, this unique group dynamic?

JE NE SAIS QUOI

"The Fantastic Four are a family who are adventure hobbyists and celebrities," Mark Gruenwald, executive editor of Marvel, pointed out. "On missions, each member is expected to do his or her part, but they never work out on maneuvers in their free time. They do it for the love of it." Ralph likened the group to DC's Challengers of the Unknown.

"The X-Men are a common cause group, activists to help their own kind," Mark continued. "They have felt the sting of bigotry and prejudice directed toward them because they are mutants. They are always persecuted, so they must work out constantly in the Danger Room. Thus, staying together is a matter of survival for them.

"The Avengers fall somewhere in between."

The policy of allowing member to come and go as they please is unique to the Avengers. No other team in the Marvel Universe operates in this manner. Yet, this characteristic in and of itself might mistakenly suggest that they are simply a group of heroes, any heroes, who happen to use the banner,

Or is it?

TEAM

"Avengers." But there is more than meets the eye.

Mark Gruenwald emphasizes that they were Marvel's only governmentally sanctioned super hero team for more than two decades before the emergence of Freedom Force and, quite recently, X-Factor. They also have a charter, their own set of self-governing rules and procedures uniquely their own. Mark hinted at the existence of an operations manual, which would explain the standards of procedure during combat situations, although "they (The Avengers) probably do not give basic training or tests on that manual. Individual members work out, but there is no obligation. The Avengers are all trained, seasoned professionals who know enough how to do it on their own.

"The Avengers is a constantly changing organization," Mark continued. "All its members have a sincere respect for and dedication to 'standard good guy stuff,' i.e. making the world safe, preventing super-villain and alien takeovers, everything that conventional authorities cannot handle. Members stay only as long as is personally convenient and very few of them rely on the Avengers as their sole means of support, as a cop would."

This may be true of an Avenger but, as Bob Harras, the current writer on **THE AVENGERS** pointed out, "If you are a super hero, then that is a given. By that mode of thinking, any Marvel hero could be an Avenger." Although Bob finds that the spirit inherent to the team is mystifyingly intangible, he is quite adamant when he states, "It's not a super hero club and shouldn't be like, 'Wow, you're a super hero. You should join us!'"

Bob feels that, after the team's inception, the individual members discovered that they enjoyed the camaraderie that came with being part of a team, but that that feeling got lost over the years. "It seemed like everyone and their mother was becoming an Avenger. I think the Avengers are loners who don't want to be loners anymore. They're people who want to belong to something, because life on their own is not as enjoyable."

"DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT IT."

Mark pointed out the reputation of the group as another driving force for heroes to want to be a part of the Avengers. "They are the only public group in the Marvel Universe and world renowned as Earth's first line of defense, the 'go to' guys," he explained. "Thus, 'Avenger' has become synonymous with respect. Anyone joining wants some of that status to rub off. It's like you'd want to be a Green Beret if you were a soldier, because they have special clout, a big bad reputation, and status among regular militia." Yet, given the nature of the team, Mark could not understand the public's positive reaction. "It seems odd that the public has such confidence and respect when they never know who is going to pick up the phone when they dial the Avengers. And yet, there is something about the very name of 'Avengers,' that Joe Q. Public knows whoever's going to be sent out on this emergency, even if they have only the powers of the Wasp, they're going to get a certain professional caliber and the job will get done."

This reverence carries over to other super-powered heroes and teams as well. Even Reed Richards of the Fantastic Four has deferred to Captain America. "Most heroes would respect the Avengers just for being Avengers," Mark explained, "unless they are of a cocky egotistical nature like, 'Sure, I could have gone the Avengers' route and gotten their status, but I don't need their reputation or Quinjets or Avengers' ID card to do good.'"

Mark likened these instances to the ideology behind becoming an independent movie company, as opposed to a major motion picture studio. There are some independent film producers who would love to get a deal with Paramount or Universal. Otherwise, doing films for smaller companies like Miramax is just fine. These smaller companies thumb their noses at the larger studios in defiance, citing that they do not need the big bucks and clout to make good movies.

What these heroes do not realize is that their negative reaction further feeds the "mystique" that is the Avengers. "Anyone worth thumbing your nose at is a major player," Mark agreed.

He also compared the status of the Avengers West Coast to that of the East Coast team the way the entertainment profession would compare Los Angeles to Broadway. "There is probably as much status given to be an Avengers West Coaster, if you live in the Western part of the country, as an Eastern part of the country resident would give the New York team," he explained. "Some people feel that acting on Broadway gains the most respect in the acting profession, while others tend to think that doing movies in Los Angeles is where it's at. Both sides have things to offer, but either way you are on the top of the heap."

No other team in the Marvel Universe is sanctioned by the U.S. Government and thus expected to react when called upon. For that matter, there isn't another team who has a twenty-four hour monitoring system manned at all times by a member to field emergency calls. The Fantastic Four have a secretary, and an android one at that, but only because Four Freedoms Plaza's main duty is to house Reed's research and he makes himself somewhat available to other scientists.

Therefore, it is no wonder that when the Avengers arrive upon the scene of a problem, they expect total cooperation from all those around them, including any super hero types who may have been there first. One can only wonder whether this attitude denotes a degree of snobbery on the group's part, but Mark disagrees. He insists that deference to the team is not demanded by its members, but battle experience tells the Avengers that they should be the ones in charge. "It's like a Jack Nicholson or Marlon Brando walking onto the set of a movie. As an actor, you would feel their presence immediately and the atmosphere in the room would

change. You would automatically find yourself saying, 'What do you think, Mr. Brando?'" New scribe on **AVENGERS WEST COAST** and the all new **FORCE WORKS** titles, Andy Lanning agreed with Mark's analogy. "There should be a certain amount of awe with the person meeting them," he said.

Also, the very appearance of the Avengers on the scene instantly indicates that this emergency is of cataclysmic proportions, an event big enough that the Avengers must be called in to handle it. "The Avengers tend to get into 'big deal' things, not just what they happen to stumble upon like other groups," Mark explained. "They are sent for as specialists, the 'super hero's super hero.' Everyone in the group, at least according to the public, makes the cut and is worth being on this team."

CECIL B. DE MILLE

These dynamics make the storylines in the **AVENGERS** more grand in scope. As Ralph Macchio put it, "There is nothing that happens within the

pages of the **AVENGERS** that does not affect the rest of the Marvel Universe, that isn't of grave importance. Everyone knows someone who is an Avenger or a reserve member." To Andy Lanning, while he was growing up, the **AVENGERS** "stood for great heroic action that you could lose yourself in and come out feeling 'that was an awesome read.'"

"Thirty years of history only creates further excitement in the future," Bob Harras commented. "Most of Marvel's books have thirty years behind them. There are soap operas as old, but people still watch them because they care about the characters and are familiar with them. If you go into the minutia of the history and say, 'Well, in 1962, Kurgo from Planet X said thus to Reed Richards and we have to do a story on that,' then you get bogged down. The secret is to give the historical aspects a twist and allow them to grow."

"What Bob has done, [drawing from his experience as] the **X-MEN** editor," Ralph Macchio added, "is taken what is contemporary and what is really popular today, without losing the classical element that is the stabilizing pillar of the **AVENGERS.**"

The potential for another Kree/Skrull War, Nefaria Trilogy, Korvac Saga, or, most recently, Galactic Storm, is always prevalent within the pages of the **AVENGERS.** "With Spider-Man, the stories are more streetwise," Bob Harras observed. "You can have smaller scope stories with individual members of the group but otherwise it would be drastic overkill, like Thor taking on a mugger." Or, as Andy Lanning added: "Like taking an elephant gun to hunt a mouse."

If the storylines in the **AVENGERS** tend toward the epic, then the art has to reflect that. Comic book greats such as Don Heck, John Buscema, George Perez and John Byrne have all brought their powerful style to the book within its thirty year history. "The **AVENGERS** has always meant beautiful draftsmanship. . .with an emphasis on the characters," Ralph Macchio remarked. "Steve Epting and

Tom Palmer, the current creative team, have established a nineties feel for the book while also hearkening back to the power and grandeur of the John Buscema/Tom Palmer era."

"The look has to be big without being too high-tech," he continued. "**X-Men** is more high-tech because the characters and the complexity of the costumes is different. The larger scope of the **AVENGERS** does not need such a complex look. Less is more. A more technical style of artwork would take away from the character interaction that the **AVENGERS** is known for."

"LIONS AND TIGERS AND BEARS, OH MY!"

The unique dynamic of a rotating roster offers endless opportunity for interesting character match-ups. Given the circumstances, past members can always appear for a particular adventure and shake up whatever ambience has been established by the current members. The current team roster is a perfect example. There is a demigod, an Inhuman, an Eternal, a former Russian espionage agent, a medieval knight and an android. "Here you have a kind of subspecies of humanity, an incredible variety of type," Ralph revealed. "This creates a group dynamic you do not get anywhere else.

Both the Fantastic Four and X-Men are limited in that they are bound to a particular group structure. In the former it is a familial relationship, while in the latter it is the onus of being a mutant. The stabilizing factor in the **AVENGERS** is the charter which serves as the parameter in which the group functions, an outer-structure as opposed to the infrastructure of the FF and X-Men.

"Because they aren't stuck together with a common bond," Ralph Macchio explained, "the characters interact in ways that other teams do not. There is a great deal of opportunity for romance, intra-group problems, and relationships. The new roster has created the possibility of a love triangle among Sersi, Dane Whitman — the Black Knight, and Crystal. And Crystal is married."

Thus, internal situations bound by the Avengers Charter give the team a personality as Mark Gruenwald explained. "The difference between the way the team is supposed to work on paper, ideally in its by-laws, and the way it actually works in the field in situations, with its personality conflicts, makes the Avengers almost a character in and of themselves. In other group books," he continued, "you do not have the group as a character. You have a bunch of individuals who you like or don't like."

Mark compared the Avengers with singular heroes such as Spider-Man and Daredevil. These characters are constantly dealing with their individual ideals of justice and what each of them can actually achieve given their physical and emotional limitations. Since the Avengers are rarely limited in the "physical limitations" aspect, their psychological structure is the foil which struggles against the team's parameters.

Bob Harras cited the team's ideology as one of its most compelling characteristics, and one that may explain the respect and "mystique" the group holds over the rest of the Marvel Universe. "The Charter, which in essence is a physical indication of the team's ideals, insists on the use of restraint. Here we have 'Earth's Mightiest Heroes' and they are bound by their own laws to use minimal 'might.' Trying to stop a situation and figuring out a way to do so, while keeping your morality intact, makes any character or team more interesting."

AGAINST THE GRAIN

The rules of the team were sorely pressed recently during the "Galactic Storm" storyline. The decision to kill the Supreme Intelligence created a rift between the Avengers and their West Coast counterpart. Although, as Bob pointed out, "for the first time in the team's history, they actually 'avenged' something," the Charter stresses a "no-kill clause."

"The ramifications of that storyline will have a profound effect on the future of the Avengers," **AVENGERS WEST COAST** Editor Nel Yomtov noted. "The foundations of the Avengers were shaken and what it means to be an Avenger was brought under very close examination."

The conflict between the bi-coastal Avengers will result in the West Coasters forsaking the Charter and their name. No longer will they be, as Andy Lanning put it, "a glorified super hero version of the United Nations. They will be more high profile and take a hands-on approach to saving the world, sort of like the difference between the UN's involvement in Ethiopia and Live Aid."

Angrily breaking all ties with their former mates, this new team, **FORCE WORKS**, will have a monitoring system, only it will be used in a preemptive fashion, utilizing the Scarlet Witch's probability hex power to pinpoint hot spots. Andy compared the process to the Chaos Theory in physical science, which states that any given equation will fall apart when put under today's computer scrutiny. In other words, even Einstein's Theory of Relativity is wrong when a computer is allowed to compute the equation to the billionth decimal point. Thus, the new team will be pro-active, arriving at emergencies *before* they happen, unlike the Avengers' reactive approach.

Yet, this tactic is an anathema to the spiritual beliefs of the Avengers. "Great power has great responsibility, but what is the definition of responsibility?" Bob Harras asked. "It's similar to that age-old question, 'If you knew Hitler, as a baby, was going to be Hitler, would you have killed him?' The Avengers could go back in time and take care of these things, so why don't they? They are kept in check by their high moral fiber."

The interaction of every manner of life and non-life, held together by expectations higher than any one member and stronger than any internal strife. Earth's first line of defense, the only "go to" guys in the Marvel Universe. The Avengers.

Like Peter Parker, Stephen Vrattos is a member of the journalistic community. Through his regular work on MARVEL AGE and the various magazine specials, including MARVEL PREVIEW '93 and the X-MEN ANNIVERSARY MAGAZINE, he has honed his writing skills by covering the broadest possible spectrum of Marvel-related topics.

Bob Harras

PRO FILES

— Steve Behling

"What I knew was what I didn't want to do. What I didn't want to do was have a normal job, which I kept telling my parents, which terrified them." Such was **AVENGERS** writer Bob Harras's state of mind when he applied for a job at Marvel in 1982.

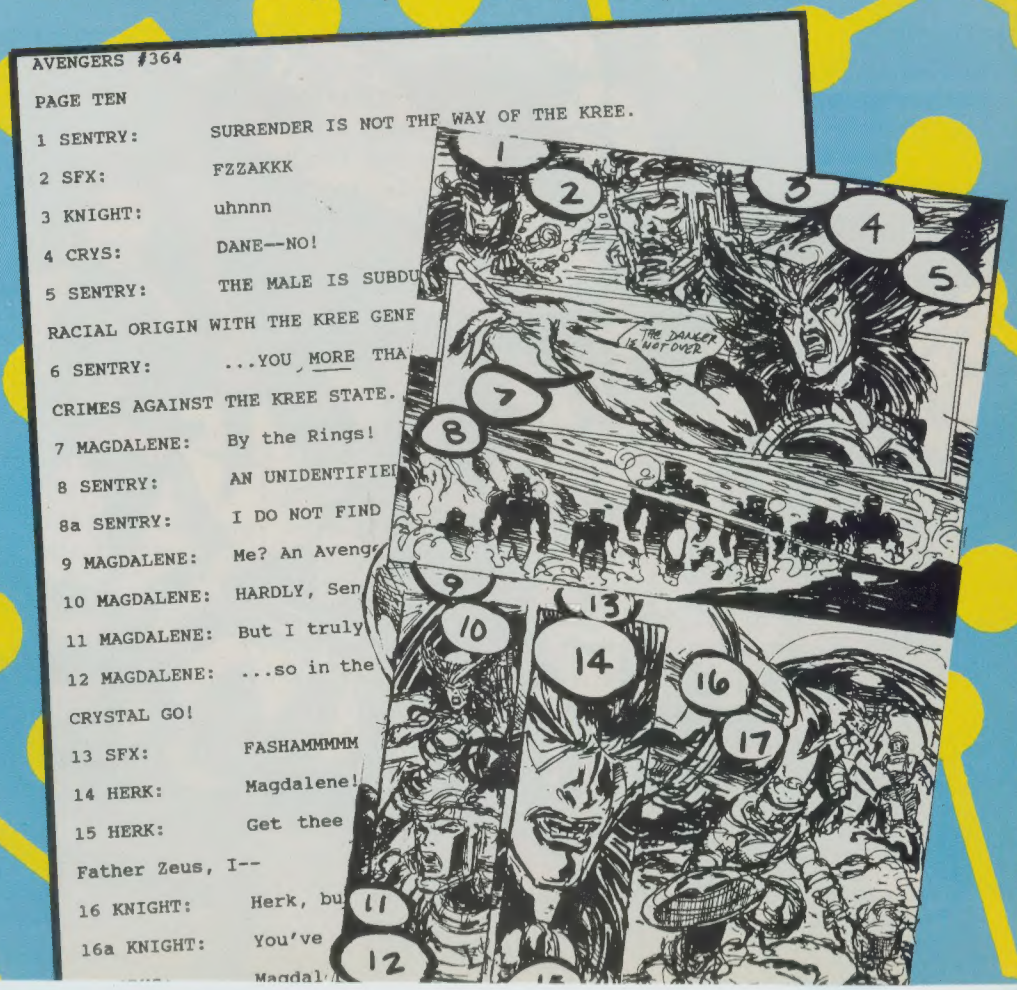
Upon graduating from **SUNY Stonybrook** ("The fine State University of New York," as Harras referred to it) with majors in English and American History, Harras applied for — and nearly accepted — a position with a major book publisher in New York City. As a last minute hedge against having that "normal job," he filled out an application at Marvel. He was called back the next day for an interview, and became then Editor-in-Chief Jim Shooter's assistant. Within two months he became current **AVENGERS'** Editor Ralph Macchio's assistant, then a managing editor for Bob Budiansky. When Editor Ann Nocenti left her position, he was offered the editorial reins of a certain group of super-powered mutants that monopolize a particular letter of the alphabet.

As to how he came to write the **AVENGERS**, Harras jokingly related that he was asked to help out with the writing chores "because the book was going bi-weekly. . . You know, it was only a temporary thing, because I wasn't intending to do the book on a regular basis," he said. No one ever said, "'Okay, here's the **AVENGERS**, it's yours.' It was more like, 'Do me a favor, handle it for a couple of months.' I'm still wondering when it's going to end," he added, laughing.

As the permanent writer, he has sought to make the **AVENGERS** truly a team in every sense of the word. "I think [for] a team book to be really successful, [it] has to be like a family. And if they're a bunch of characters who are just set together, because they have their own titles. . .[then] it's a team-up book, as opposed to a team book," Harras explained. His philosophy is to take characters that the reader will, for the most part, only find in the **AVENGERS**, and exploit them to their full potential. "To do a really good **AVENGERS** story," he said, explaining this philosophy, "you get a group of people. . .you see them only in the **AVENGERS**, you get to know them really well."

Part of the challenge in doing a team book, then, is to allow the perhaps lesser known characters to shine through, rather than putting more "commercial" characters within the fabric of the **AVENGERS** team. Harras stated a preference to choose characters who would "form romantic triangles. . .friendships . . .rivalries. . .because that's what made the **AVENGERS** really, really strong in the beginning. . .when the second shift came in (**AVENGERS #16**). Scarlet Witch, Hawkeye, that's when it got really interesting to me." He then chuckled, adding quickly, "I wasn't around when that happened, because I'm much too young to have been there."

Harras looks forward to bringing new cast members into the **AVENGERS** family in the months ahead, and crafting stories to revolve even more around those characters — "rather than. . .'oh my God, they're fighting Galactus's evil brother this month,'" as he stated with a laugh. He has a vision of the direction in which he wants to take the book, but no blueprints set in concrete. "My way is much more chaotic, you know, but I kind of like that. That way no one can pin me down!"


AVENGERS #364

PAGE TEN

1 SENTRY: SURRENDER IS NOT THE WAY OF THE KREE.

2 SFX: FZZAKKK

3 KNIGHT: uhnnn

4 CRYS: DANE--NO!

5 SENTRY: THE MALE IS SUBDU

RACIAL ORIGIN WITH THE KREE GENE

6 SENTRY: ...YOU MORE THA

CRIMES AGAINST THE KREE STATE.

7 MAGDALENE: By the Rings!

8 SENTRY: AN UNIDENTIFIE

8a SENTRY: I DO NOT FIND

9 MAGDALENE: Me? An Aveng

10 MAGDALENE: HARDLY, Sen

11 MAGDALENE: But I truly

12 MAGDALENE: ...so in the

CRYSTAL GO!

13 SFX: FASHAMMMMM

14 HERK: Magdalene!

15 HERK: Get thee

Father Zeus, I--

16 KNIGHT: Herk, bu

16a KNIGHT: You've

Magdal

THE MAKING OF THE AVENGERS

X-MEN CROSSOVER

It started small — just the kidnapping of a baby.

Then a red angel appeared (see **X-FACTOR #92**), inviting mutants to come with him to "heaven," but only if they wanted to go.

Then there was that little matter of a major genocidal war breaking out in Genosha. . .

Last January, **AVENGERS** writer/**X-MEN** Editor Bob Harras, and **X-MEN** writer Fabian Nicieza decided that Quicksilver, Crystal, and Scarlet Witch would face their "Blood Ties" with Magneto in this fall's X-Men/Avengers crossover. **UNCANNY X-MEN** writer Scott Lobdell wanted to up the stakes by blowing the conflict in Genosha sky-high. During the four months of tossing ideas back and forth, the editorial and writing teams created Exodus, a brand new super powerful villain worthy of both teams, and finally felt they had laid the appropriate groundwork necessary for the epic.

In the words of **UNCANNY X-MEN** writer Scott Lobdell, "Exodus is the next big thing; Magneto for the '90s. This isn't your father's **X-MEN**."

Nor your father's **AVENGERS**. Not only will this Avengers/X-Men crossover be unique in that it will find them not fighting against each other, but side-by-side, but by the time the action is over, the East Coast Avengers will be re-evaluating their team's very foundations, and the West Coast members will be questioning their allegiance to their East Coast teammates. In sum, the fallout for all teams promises to be much more than 30th anniversary fanfare and fireworks; according to the creative teams, it should be nothing short of *nuclear meltdown*.

"I think that what we were lacking earlier, we are definitely *not* lacking now," Nicieza said confidently. "The outline I did originally was based almost entirely on family. That's what the X-Men books are about, but that's not necessarily what the Avengers books are about. The story we have now is completely about family, but it's also completely about excessive use of power in a very volatile international situation. It has a lot of human interest and will have a lot of wide, sweeping consequences."

AVENGERS Editor Ralph Macchio agreed. "I definitely believe that the fact that this crossover has gone through several evolutions is indicative of the fact that we're really trying to perfect it," he said. "I think we've got something more than worthy of being the 30th anniversary issue. All the meetings and mental strain are really going to pay off."

The five-issue storyline will take off in **AVENGERS #368**, run through **X-MEN #26**, regular-sized **AVENGERS WEST COAST #101**, **UNCANNY X-MEN #307**, and conclude in a double-sized AVENGERS **#369**. As for that **AVENGERS WEST COAST** issue, it is one number shy of the termination of the series and the launch of the team members' new title, **FORCE WORKS**, which will be written by Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning (**PUNISHER**, Marvel UK), and penciled by Marvel newcomer Thomas Tenny.

HUMAN TNT

To ignite the fuse, the baby to be kidnapped is Luna, Crystal's and Quicksilver's human child. The kidnapper, fallen Acolyte Fabian Cortez, needs a bargaining chip with Luna's grandad Magneto, who's very, very mad at Cortez for a little matter of attempted murder (**X-MEN #3**).

The red angel — no angel at all, but the aforementioned Exodus — turns out to be Magneto's most faithful acolyte. Heaven is, or would be, Avalon, once Graymalkin, Cable's satellite home, now Magneto's orbiting mutant paradise, rebuilt stronger than ever.

Paradoxically, Magneto won't be directly involved in the action at all, as was originally planned. He won't be quite himself following **X-MEN #25**.

Still, just because Magneto isn't a player, no one

should rest easy. Indeed, since Exodus promotes the cause, but lacks Magneto's life experiences, this acolyte may be even more dangerous than the Master of Magnetism, Lobdell offered, obviously excited about taking his crack at the character. "You can think of Exodus as Magneto without the safeguards," he added. "He doesn't have Magneto's connection with the past. Magneto's persecution as a Gypsy during World War II meant that he had a certain emotional investment, not just in making sure there was no mutant holocaust, but in the possibility that he could become what he hated — the mutant version of Hitler.

"Magneto has also gone through a bunch of different changes in his life, from super villain to misunderstood super hero to frustrated guardian of the New Mutants to leader of the Hellfire Club.

"Exodus is the next big thing:

When you have someone as powerful as Exodus interpreting Magneto's life, which part of Magneto's life does he reflect the most?" he posed.

In the original plot synopsis developed by Nicieza and Harras last February, Cortez emerged as the main villain. Early in the planning stages, Magneto was also to play a key role in the crossover. When that changed, what happened to Quicksilver and Scarlet Witch's "Blood Ties" with no father on stage? "Who Magneto is and what he's about and how he influences other people, though, will be a predominant theme throughout the storyline," Nicieza assured. The actions of both Cortez and Exodus would force Quicksilver and Scarlet Witch into a lot of self-reflection about their father, especially when Exodus wants them to take over their father's mantle.

LEGACIES AND ROLES

"What really is the legacy of being the child of someone you really hate, and cannot escape from at all?" Harras asked. "No matter how many times you try to lead a normal life, there are going to be people who are going to go after you because of who you are. [Exodus] needs somebody to hang onto, and the children of Magneto become very important."

For example, the potential is created for Quicksilver to leave the crossover with decisions finally resolved in his mind about both his relationship with his father and his role in X-Factor, not to mention his relationship with Crystal. As for further ramifications, Harras added that the Black Knight will feel the effects of Quicksilver's latter decision "in a major way," forcing him (by **AVENG-**

ERS #369) to make a decision about how to deal with Sersi.

To use Luna in the crossover raised interesting issues, Harras added, because she is a human, her mother is an Inhuman, her father a mutant, and her grandfather one of the most powerful mutants on Earth and a man who has dedicated his life to protecting mutantkind from persecution by. . . humans. "Luna is the character that links the two books," he noted. "Just by the fact of her existence, she seemed like the natural linkage. Her importance will become even more vital because she is the heir, the heir who doesn't really measure up."

. . . discontion in the AVENGERS.

Luna's kidnapping could also strike a bittersweet chord between Scott Summers and Jean Grey, setting the groundwork for a major, major event in their lives at the end of the year, Nicieza teased. "It hearkens back to their fear not just about what happened to them in 'X-Cutioner's Song,' but also when Nathan was kidnapped by Apocalypse and sent into the future," he explained. "That's how they lost their baby, their child."

PRESSURES

Nicieza and Lobdell added that, because much character development does not occur until they dive into the actual writing process, they cannot at this point guarantee who will be at the forefront or take a back seat of the adventure. Well, except that something happens to Wolverine that takes him out of the action, and it ain't pretty. Again, Nicieza would only tease: "A lot of people make decisions that they normally wouldn't make. Xavier is taking steps that he never would have taken before. The pressure's really starting to get on all these guys."

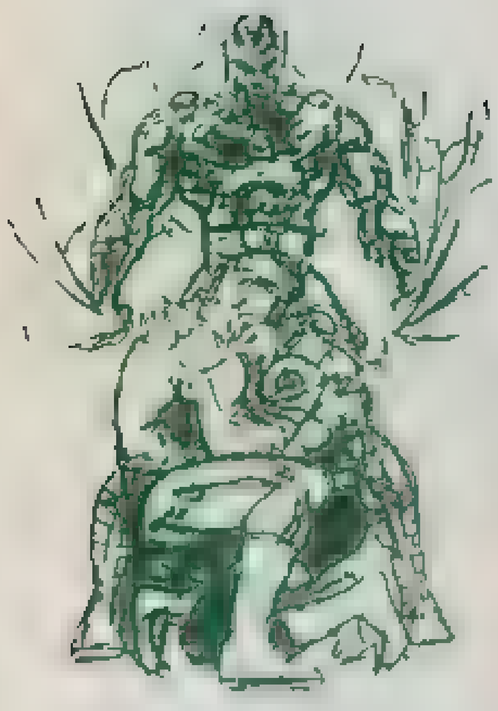
Character developments are flying fast and furious over at **AVENGERS WEST COAST**, as well. Editor Nel Yomtov revealed that, thanks to a startling death in issue #100, Hawkeye definitely *won't* be himself.

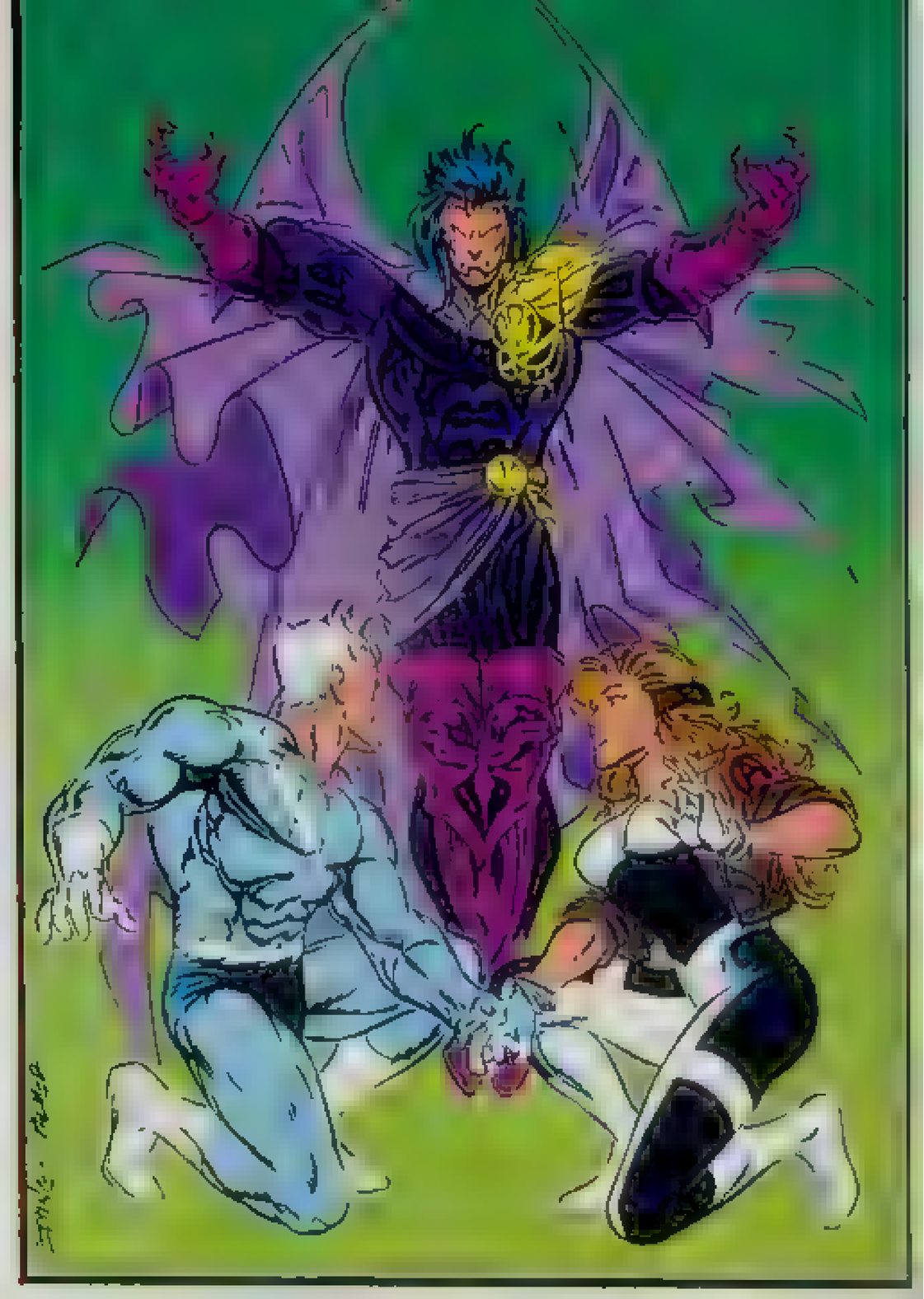
And the cynical loner USAgent will finally be finding a friend and ally in Spider-Woman. According to Nel, he wanted to develop the relationship to create communication between the Agent and the team. The idea is that he will become close enough to her that he feels that she is one person whom he can approach and talk to while the rest of the team members interact with one another. "Their lives, as different as they may seem, actually have a lot of parallels in the past," Yomtov said.

"As a single parent, she feels extremely torn between her role as a super hero and what she feels her role as a mother should be," he elaborated. "She has a lot of ambivalence toward the concept of family because her family with a husband didn't work, and she feels a lot of guilt. USAgent, according to his origin, feels very responsible for the death of his parents. It's a burden, the 'Marvel angst' that our characters are so noted for."

Of course, one of the major treats in a crossover such as this occurs when two characters from different corners of the Marvel Universe meet and interact. Since both books have carried a reputation for being character-driven, Macchio hoped for results that would be more than just fun. "I think it would be interesting to see how a new team of Aven-

(Left ro right) Dave Ross, Roy Thomas, and Nel Yomtov at the X-Men/Avengers summit, discussing ways in which the AVENGERS WEST COAST will participate in the crossover. Photo by Steve Saffel





The evolution of a cover—as Magneto's role in the crossover changed, he was replaced on the cover of AVENGERS #369 by Exodus, as seen in these pencils by Steve Epting and in the finished piece by Steve Epting and Tom Palmer

gers interacts with this team of X-Men, and how a somewhat younger team of X-Men deals with the Avengers," he offered. "Would they have a sort of deference towards them? Would there be animosity? As far as matching the powers in fights and all that stuff, I'm not as interested in that as in how they would deal with each other as people."

"In a lot of ways, a crossover is just putting a puzzle together," Nicieza said. "You have to get from Point A to Point B; so much of what your characters do is focused solely on that, with the only characterization being the opportunity to mix a couple of characters who normally would not be together. It's just a matter of seeing who I'm going to have available, and then going, 'all right, this could be a neat little trick.'"

What might the outcome be?

"I don't think that Spider-Woman and Bobby [Iceman] have ever met," Lobdell said, offering an example on the most basic level. "It's been years since Jean Grey and Wanda have talked on-panel, and they both have a long history of having their minds and bodies manipulated by outside forces."

Lobdell expressed excitement at an opportunity to write the Avengers characters, tracing his interest in the Avengers back to his earliest comics reading days. "It's always been my dream to write the first wave of Marvel super heroes," he admitted. "Any opportunity I have to write them, I always enjoy myself, whether I do an Avengers villain here, a Captain America cameo there, an **EXCALIBUR** issue with the Black Panther. My first book that I ever recall reading was **AVENGERS #137**, which featured the Beast's [induction] into the Avengers. so it's kind of ironic that my first exposure to the Avengers involved highlighting an **X-MEN** character. I'm looking forward to working with the Avengers, even if it's just for an issue or two."

Harras agreed that character interaction also interested him — more than battle pair ups — including interaction between Avengers team mates such as ex-couple Scarlet Witch and the Vision. According to Ralph Macchio, indeed, the timing of the crossover is perfect, given Harras's connection to the X-Men as editor and the particular direction [as writer] he has taken the East Coast Avengers team, which Macchio described as more like the X-Men in terms of an "outsider" quality.

"The Avengers were being presented as guys who have everything and are very conventional," Harras offered. "I think that's incredibly boring. But if you put a little grit on them, and a little anger, I guess in some sense it does bring them closer to the X-Men. Also, getting that family feelingQthe crossover would not work at all if you didn't have a family feeling among the two teams, that can lend some sort of emotional feeling when they come across something that threatens them both."

ON THE WAR FRONT

As for that war in Genosha, the creative teams only offered tantalizing tidbits: on the surface, mutates are dying by the thousands from the Legacy disease, and mob paranoia has caused the human population to instigate mass genocide. Behind the

scenes, Nicieza revealed only that Cortez is pulling some of the strings. After all, quantity may not equal quality, but a lot of dead mutates would add up, and now that Magneto has been revealed as still alive, Cortez needs to win back his lead in the Upstarts [described by Nicieza as a "billionaires boys club" competing in a mutant *Death Race 2000*].

All that Harras and Nicieza would add is that, by the end of the conflict in Genosha, the Avengers would be left with some big decisions, and they will definitely be breaking their ties with the United Nations. "I think it will be interesting to see how the Avengers react to Genosha, which is something they may not be keenly aware of," Harras said. "As a U.N.-connected group, the Avengers have to go against certain U.N. sanctions to get there. That sets up a lot of conflict among them. Genosha's closest approximation is South Africa." Scott Lobdell cited Bosnia-Hercegovina as a similar situation in the modern-day world of reality.

"There are going to be major changes in the set-up of the Avengers," Harras stressed, though the actual parting from the U.N. won't affect his plotting that much, given the fact that he has never stressed the U.N. connection in his run of the book. "The U.N. split will just be a sub-text of their conversation, not their main issue, when the Avengers get to Genosha."

All of which may be a great deal more important to the Avengers West Coast, who will discover that they do not necessarily agree with their East Coast teammates on a number of key issues. So suggested Nel Yomtov, who is in the process of setting up the final events that lead to the new **FORCE WORKS** title. "The real critical thing for me to define in this series is the relationship between the East and West Coast Avengers," he explained in practical terms. "I don't want them to grow closer. I want to use this opportunity to develop dissension in the ranks of the Avengers. If I can gain much of that and have the other books pick up on it here and there, I will feel that this has succeeded in setting up what I want in the future."

UNCANNY X-MEN Writer Scott Lobdell (left) and Editor/writer Bob Harras (right) at the summit. Photos by Steve Saffel

AVENGERS WEST COAST Writer Roy Thomas and Editor Nel Yomtov

For the creative teams, it all comes back to Nicieza's guarantee: "wide, sweeping consequences," or, in Lobdell's words, "What happens in the course of this Genosha story line will have a major impact on the dynamics between humans and mutants for years to come."

He added only that Genosha will not be blowing up. . .*yet*. . .and that he is surprised and delighted by the conclusion Nicieza conceived for the crossover. "We were having lunch and talking about it, when out of the blue [Fabian] said, 'Why don't we try something different this time?" Lobdell said, revealing a general tonal quality that he feels has not been seen on the X-Men side of the Marvel Universe for what he terms as far too long.

As atoms are unstable, though, Harras warns that fans should not read current plot plans as any sort of "bible" the creative teams are bound to follow. Over the summer [and in the weeks following the time this article must go to press], editors and writers will be exchanging ideas and fine-tuning characterization and plot. In other words, when it comes to crossovers, count on all sorts of last minute juicy developments.

"That's how you write," he said. "In 'Galactic Storm,' it wasn't until the end that we said, 'well, the bomb's going to go off.' Originally, we didn't want to do that.

"So, by the time the series comes out, it could be completely different."

Anya Martin's full bio reveals that she has been associated with the X-universe since her days as an award-winning costumer attending the Atlanta Fantasy Fair. In a professional capacity, she has been associated with Tundra publishing and with a number of publications both in the comics field and in mainstream journalism.

PRO FILES

- Steve Bebling

Steve Epting

I used to look at **THE AVENGERS** [and think], 'that would be a book I would really *not* want to draw,' because it had all that machinery all over the walls," penciler Steve Epting said in a humorous tone. Yet, in an amazingly short period of time, he has helped create a distinctive, very '90s look for that very same book.

Before he came on **THE AVENGERS**, Epting attended college at the University of South Carolina, where he was a graphic design major. He "did a little bit of graphic design" when he left college, before landing a job with now-defunct First Comics in 1989. His work appeared in the series *Whisper*, as well as in a few back-up stories for the classic *Nexus* series. This led to his penciling and inking two spin-off mini-series, *Hammer of God* and *Hammer of God: Hammer of Justice*. "I was a big fan of *Nexus*, real familiar with all the characters," Epting said. Unfortunately, *Hammer of Justice* "was the last thing First published. After that happened, I was mailing in submissions, but everybody told me I had no chance of getting hired that way," Epting stated.

Fortunately for Epting, 'everybody' turned out to be wrong. "Howard Mackie [then **AVENGERS** editor] called me from a mailed-in submission, right before he left editing." At that time, **THE AVENGERS** was running bi-weekly, and another penciler was needed to alternate every other issue. "Whoever was supposed to alternate didn't work out and I ended up doing all the bi-weeklies," Epting said, and he's been with the book since.

Epting was heavily influenced by the science fiction stories he read in his youth (Isaac Asimov, in particular), and by the work of such artists as Al Williamson and Alex Raymond, the legendary creator of *Flash Gordon* — "Real heroic figures," he said, and that is what he tries to project within the framework of **THE AVENGERS**. He also said, "we're trying to give it [the book] an updated look. . .I've been trying to work on the technology. . .there's stuff like that that the **X-MEN** have." Quite a change of tune from the man who once said he didn't want to draw **THE AVENGERS** because of all the machinery! But it is the essence of change, he feels, that is keeping his work fresh and exciting.

One of the main challenges of the book is figuring out how to handle the intricate scenes involving the Avengers' multi-character cast. Epting noted that he has "to be careful not to let certain characters drop into the background. Some of the secondary characters. . .I don't want it to feel like they're not even there." He tries to give each character a "distinct personality" through the way they're drawn, through their physicality. Also difficult is penciling the non-action scenes. "It's challenging . . .people are standing around in a room talking. And at the same time, that's when you really have to worry about the characters' expressions and gestures."

Characterized by Tom Palmer as "a very modest fellow," and "very quiet, laid back. . .I think very quietly confident in his abilities," Steve Epting is looking towards the future with his work on **THE AVENGERS**, despite the machinery!

Tom Palmer

PRO FILES

Steve Behling

"Ralph's going to have to buy a firearm or something to get rid of me on this book!" said inker/colorist Tom Palmer of his current run with **THE AVENGERS**. It is unlikely that Editor Ralph Macchio would contemplate such an act, given Palmer's tenure, familiarity, and sheer enthusiasm for the title.

Upon graduating from art school in the late '60s, Palmer began working in the art field. At the same time, he came to Marvel and met Sol Brodsky, who gave him his first work in comics. That was the first time he became acquainted with the book known as **THE AVENGERS**. "I was green, fledgling guy in the business," when he was given the opportunity to ink over the pencils of legendary artist John Buscema, Palmer said. "And how can I turn down the opportunity to work with John?. . .I think they'd come after me with a strait-jacket!" During this time, Palmer also met Neal Adams and inked and colored several issues of **THE UNCANNY X-MEN**.

Palmer went on to work on such books as **TOMB OF DRACULA**, **STAR WARS**, and **2010: A SPACE ODYSSEY** before finally returning to **THE AVENGERS**. Around eight or nine years ago, as he recalled, "I got a call from Mark Gruenwald (then **AVENGERS** editor) who wanted to know if I would do one issue of **THE AVENGERS**. Well. . .a few other guys have come and gone and I'm still there."

Excitement, along with such influences as John Buscema, Jack Kirby, and Gene Colan, have fueled Palmer's inking and coloring. "I was just amazed [at] the dexterity that they had. I had heroes, but here obviously there were other heroes to be seen." He feels one of the keys to his success as an inker has been careful observance of influences, mixed with his own sensibility. "I think the best thing to do," he said, "is. . .to take only the best from the people that you admire, and if you can incorporate that. . ."

And inking the book gives him insight into how it should be colored. "I have to be involved with the book," he stated, in order to properly use colors to set moods and tones for the scenes

Palmer is particularly excited by the direction in which **THE AVENGERS** is currently heading, both on a story level, and an art level. "Bob is going to do some great things. He's only hinted at them, and even if he told me I wouldn't divulge them," he said. And of particular interest to him are the changes being made in the book's overall appearance. "Issue #364 was the first chance we had to use airbrushing. . .and it shows And in a few months, they're going to add a few more percentages of color . . .there'll be more subtle hues and values. I think the book is just going to change."

In the final analysis, Tom Palmer's unbridled enthusiasm has kept him with **THE AVENGERS** for a tremendous, highly creative run, one which he sees no reason to end. If he left now, he said, he'd be "leaving the tour bus before we've gotten to the main event! This is going to be a great ride."

AVENGERS FUTURES

THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD

Stan Lee once remarked that the toughest thing about writing the Avengers was remembering who they were. After the forthcoming changes in both Avengers and Avengers West Coast, shakeups will leave even the most dedicated readers dizzy.

The defining characteristic of the Avengers, now celebrating their thirtieth anniversary, has always been change: This tradition of change began in 1964; Stan Lee, in the now-classic "The Old Order Changeth," did what had never occurred in a comic book team before: he *radically* changed the team. In **Avengers #16**, Giant-Man, Wasp, Iron Man and Thor left the Avengers, creating an opening for Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch. Since that classic issue, the Avengers have had a constantly rotating and evolving roster.

As we enter the 30th anniversary of Earth's Mightiest Heroes, the change which has always marked the Avengers books will accelerate, becoming an even greater facet of both **THE AVENGERS** and **AVENGERS WEST COAST.** Not merely change of members, but change that transforms the basic motivations and philosophies of both the East and West Coast groups.

THEY WERE ONCE EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES. THEY'RE ABOUT TO BECOME AVENGERS.

According to **AVENGERS** Editor Ralph Macchio, "the team is going to finally live up to their name. The fans always ask why they're called 'Avengers'; they don't *avenge* anybody. Basically, the Avengers began this change almost a year ago in 'Operation: Galactic Storm'. The Avengers made a life-changing decision to kill the Supreme Intelligence, creating a rift between Captain America and the new Avengers — sort of, the old guard vs. the new."

Bob Harras, the writer of **THE AVENGERS** for more than a year, now, commented that, "the thing I'm trying to change in the book is its past 'hero-of-the-month' mentality. I think the Avengers are a family, a group of people who intermingle with each other and have motivations that *don't* always match. They're friends, and in a world that is increasingly untrusting of heroes with any sort of powers, these individuals may be the only 'peers' they've got. My approach is to make the team more introverted and less extroverted. What I mean is that this isn't 'Bad Guy X attacks town and the Avengers run to the rescue' anymore. I'm trying to flesh these characters out. These characters have enough problems and issues in their own lives to go another thirty years' worth of issues. 'Course, that's not to say they'll live that long.

"A major Marvel hero is going to die in the first issue of FORCE WORKS."

"And, of course, that doesn't mean that the team is turning its back on the traditions that defined them. No, the team is coming into the nineties. They're going to be. . .meaner, but so are the times. We'll be dealing with how this team can remain Earth's Mightiest Heroes when the world itself is falling apart."

Like all philosophies, these changes affect the lives of the Avengers. "Captain America is finding himself out of the loop with the other members," Harras remarked. "While he's considered by most the quintessential member of the Avengers, these aren't the same old Avengers. His basic moral and ethical code may no longer be consistent with who or what the Avengers are today.

"Ironically, except for perhaps a few members, the only thing that won't be changing drastically in the near future is the core membership of the team. Within the Avengers you'll be seeing more interpersonal conflict than ever before. The Sersi/Black Knight/Crystal love triangle will evolve into a Black Knight/Crystal/Quicksilver triangle as Quicksilver, Crystal's husband who first joined the team in **AVENGERS #16**, not only returns to the book, but may find himself in a pivotal role. Quicksilver's been enjoying a lot of attention by fans in the pages of **X-FACTOR**, so the Avengers [tie-in] will be a great opportunity to take the character even farther.

"Of course, Sersi's sanity will continue to erode in the months ahead; what part the Black Knight will play is still being determined. And. . .there'll be one more major blowout with Proctor. The Vision, one of my all-time favorite characters, will become a little more visible, if you'll pardon the pun, and we'll see what's going on inside him as he will actually be dealing with his lost humanity, perhaps trying to get it back. He's had a family, and he's lost it. Who knows what effect that can have on a person. The Swordsman and Magdaline will also play a big part, especially in light of their past involvement with the Gatherers.

"Hera's curse on Hercules will become an issue as we see how it effects his relationship with this woman he's been dating, Taylor Dane," he continued. "And Hank Pym, the original Ant-Man, Giant-Man, Goliath, Goliath II, whatever you call him, will

be returning to the team. It's funny, because he was an Avenger way before Captain America.

"Like all the best books Marvel's ever produced, the Avengers will be character driven."

For an overall sense of storyline direction, Ralph Macchio stated that, "Avengers #366 begins a storyline that will drastically affect the Avengers. Without revealing too much, the Kree's return for revenge will develop a conflict with repercussions that will affect the book for years to come."

SPARING NO CHANGE

When the West Coast Avengers were first formed in 1984, the purpose of the team was to safeguard and support the country and world as Avengers. And now, on the eve of the **AWC's** tenth anniversary, the team's discovered — much to their disappointment — that they're sort of substitute Avengers. . .hand-me-down characters not taken seriously by either rest of the world or their fellow east coast counterparts. Again, change will drive a new direction to the book. In fact, **AVENGERS WEST COAST** ends with issue #102.

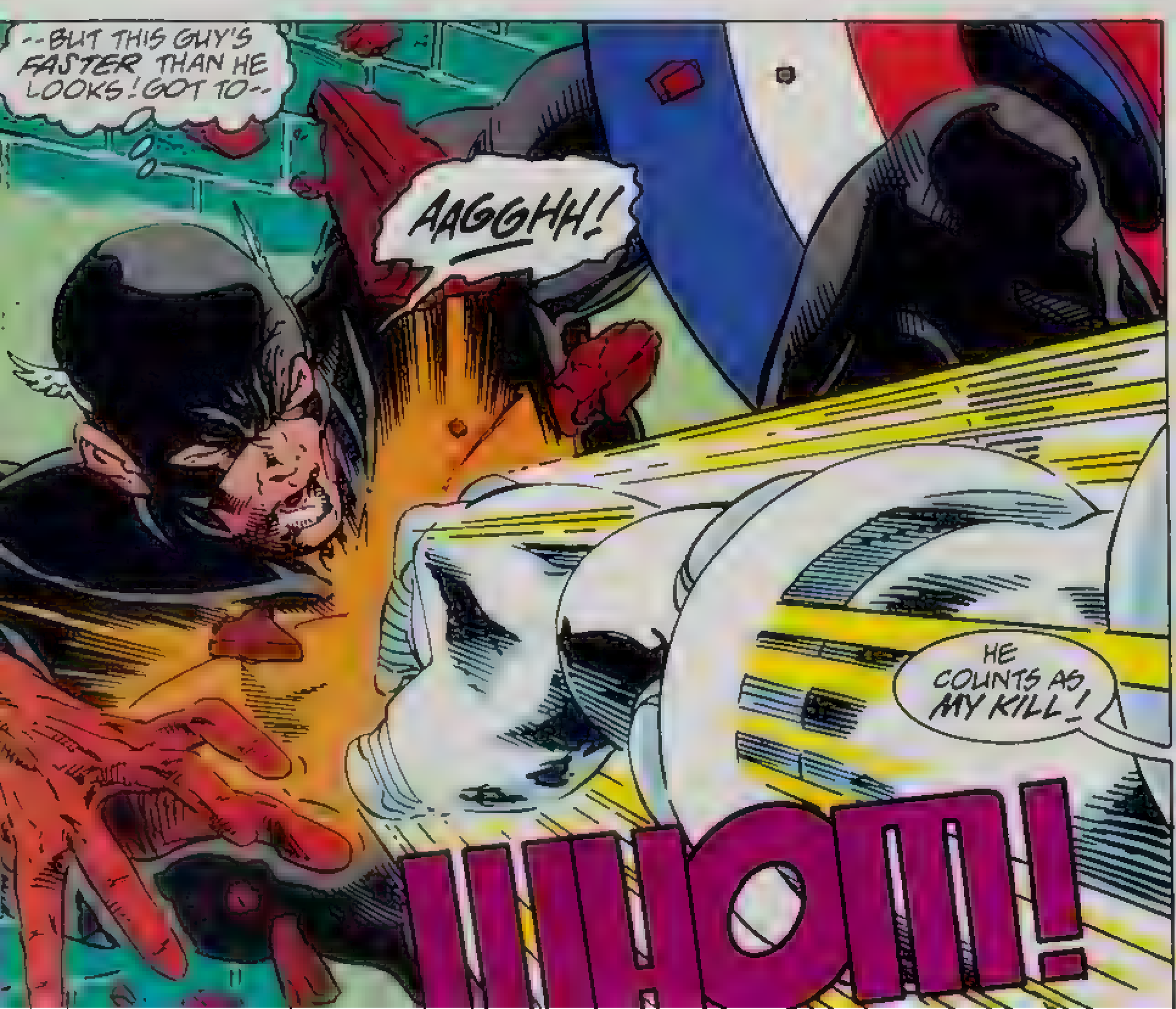
In the wake of a member's tragic death, broken promises and dreams, a loss of purpose, and loss of Avengers status, a new team will be born. . .**FORCE WORKS.**

"It'll be a different sort of title — in fact, it's not even going to be an Avengers book anymore. It's an aggressive turning away from Avengers tradition," Editor Nel Yomtov revealed. "It's simply not the same old team. First of all, these are characters that are tired of being treated like second-stringers. They're angry, dismayed, and frankly *very* ticked off by the second class treatment they've received. By the end of **AVENGERS WEST COAST #102,** they've shed blood and made the ultimate sacrifice for the sake of the world, and it's gotten them nowhere.

"Keep in mind, these are characters of immense power. Of course, there's Iron Man, who will join the group and serve as technical and financial backer. His arrival prompts the sudden departure of War Machine, *aka* Jim Rhodes, who was once Iron Man's most trusted companion. Their ongoing feud has been fully detailed in recent issues of **IRON MAN.**

The Scarlet Witch will lead the group in the field. Most of what people expect from the Scarlet Witch will change. She's becoming more powerful and will be indispensable to the workings of the group. Her ability to lead and the further evolution of her powers will be dealt with in an upcoming **SCARLET WITCH** limited series.

Spider-Woman and U.S.Agent make up the last two members of the previously established Force Works team. The U.S.Agent seems to have lost some of his brashness and arrogance of late, but for reasons not yet explored. He'll get it back. Spider-Woman, on the other hand, is slowly discovering



more about her origins as revealed in the **SPIDER-WOMAN** limited series due out late this fall. Wonder Man will also play a big part in the genesis of Force Works, even though he will not be a member of the team. An all-new fifth member of the team is in the "works," Yomtov revealed cryptically.

According to Andy Lanning, who, with Dan Abnett, will write the series, "They are all incredibly talented people who have to live up to a certain image. U.S.Agent is in Captain America's shadow. Spider-Woman is in Spider-Man's, and the Scarlet Witch is in her ex-husband's [the Vision].

"The name 'Works' is actually derived from this huge piece of computer technology that Stark has constructed for the team. This computer has the ability to recognize and spot potential dangers for the rest of the world, and will operate in conjunction with the Scarlet Witch's mutant abilities to affect probabilities. A lot of what happens with the team will stem from this computer. The name of the team is actually the name of the building they make their headquarters."

In addition, Force Works is going to be more public. According to Nel, they'll be involved with building a public relations campaign. Readers will see some of the first major advertising for a super hero team within the Marvel Universe. How this "commercial" approach to heroing affects the rest of the super hero community will be the subject of future storylines.

Hawkeye will not be involved in the team and will head out on his own after the X-Men/Avengers crossover of **AVENGERS WEST COAST #101.** He will star in a limited series coming out in late '93 (see "Avengers Solo" article).

"Force Works will be a different sort of series in the sense that these heroes will be getting their hands *dirty* saving the world," said Abnett, who, with partner Lanning, has scored a big success on **PUNISHER** and on a number of the Marvel UK books. When asked about what will be happening in **FORCE WORKS**, Dan only remarked with a frustrated tone, "Well, Nel won't let us blow up the world."

According to a FAX from Lanning and Abnett, the changes in the lives of these characters are going to be dramatic. "A major Marvel hero is going to die in the first issue of **FORCE WORKS.** This individual's death is going to have long-standing effects on the team."

The Scarlet Witch's powers will also be increased dramatically as we develop her into one of the most powerful characters in the Marvel Universe.

The duo of writers has a lot of ideas for the new series, the fate of which often depends on tight coordination with the other participants in the Avengers microverse, including Editors Nel Yomtov and Ralph Macchio, and **AVENGERS** writer Bob Harras. For example, the FAX revealed, "We're playing with the possibility of [using] Mr. Immortal, a character seen briefly in AWC #48-49. We love this character. Mr. I's (calling him 'Mr. I' is cooler than Mr. Immortal) power, as we see it, is his ability to regenerate his own body when he is killed. He was by far the

most interesting character in the Great Lakes Avengers. And more, each time he dies, he comes back with a new super power. This is his body's natural way of evolving into a being that can't be killed. If he ever does develop a super power he actually likes, he may actively try not to get killed, something at odds with the character. We've heard that fans in America like it when a character dies. So from now on, you can expect a lot of death in each issue.

Lanning and Abnett are still sketching out the first year of tales, and have proposed that a splinter group of the Kree race may be planning revenge on members of the Avengers for their participation in the Galactic Storm holocaust, and one of their prime targets is now a part of the Force Works cast, so that the ramifications will begin to appear in the very first issue of the new title. This storyline will involve particularly careful communication with Avengers writer Bob Harras, Editor Ralph Macchio, and the **FORCE WORKS** editorial/creative team in order to bring the complex tale to fruition.

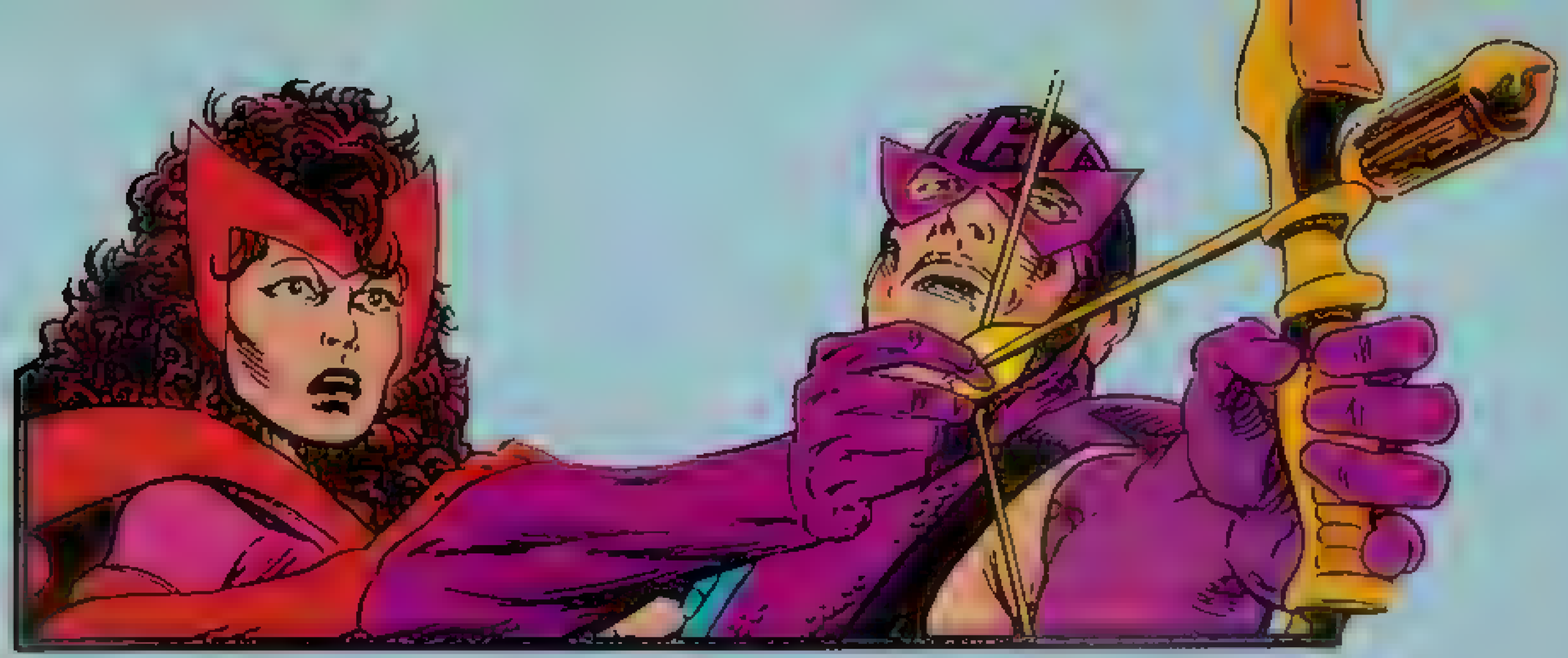
A NEW AVENGERS WEST COAST IS IN THE *WORKS*

When Stan Lee remarked that the toughest thing about writing the Avengers was remembering who they were, the new creators behind both teams are betting that he'll have an even tougher time recognizing the teams of today. And for new readers, the new Avengers are going to be even harder to forget.

Jim Kreuger recently moved his entire comics collection from the Midwest to New York City, where he is a copywriter for the Marvel Promotions and Advertising department and a semi-regular contributor to MARVEL AGE and the other magazine specials.

It's Really Big:

The Avengers and Major Events



legendary super hero returns to life. A battle for interstellar supremacy is waged between two powerful alien races and Earth is caught in the middle. A time-travelling super villain attempts to stop the ascension of the Cosmic Madonna. An ancient demon is brought forth and brings revelations that shatter the lives of several heroes. Who are at the center of all of these pivotal events?

The Avengers, Earth's mightiest heroes.

Throughout the thirty years of their existence, The Avengers have served as the launching pad for many of the most important events in the Marvel universe. The team seems to be a magnet for these big stories, inviting writers to set in motion plotlines that will be felt all over the Marvel's continuity. What makes the Avengers the center of these events and why do stories that happen in the Avengers seem to effect the whole Marvel Universe?

Earth's Mightiest Heroes

According to **AVENGERS** Editor Ralph Macchio, the **AVENGERS** are at the core of the Marvel Universe. "The characters in the **AVENGERS** are at the center of the Marvel web, whenever something happens to the team, the radiation up the web is felt all over the place. I think the reason for that is, initially, the characters in the Avengers were characters that had their own series: Iron Man, Thor, Hulk, Giant Man and The Wasp. They all had their own comics or frequently guest-starred, and so when something happened in **THE AVENGERS**, it had to have an effect in most of the rest of the books that we were publishing at the time," said Macchio.

Current **AVENGERS** writer Bob Harras has changed the line-up of the team by replacing established heroes with a group of 'second stringers.' However, Macchio's theory of the Avengers central placement in the Marvel Universe still holds true.

"In the current Avengers, while less well known, are still representatives from all over the Marvel Universe. There's Captain America, perhaps the ultimate super hero, Hercules — who has links to the mythological parts of the universe; Crystal — who is an Inhuman which ties her to the Fantastic Four; plus she is married to Quicksilver, thus connecting to the X-Men; Sersi, who is an Eternal. There's the Black Knight whose lineage is goes back into ancient times with King Arthur and Merlin, and you have The Vision, who has been a been a member of the Avengers for about 20 years. So even though these aren't characters who have their own series, they still inspire stories that are right at the center of the Marvel Universe," Macchio said.

"That's one of the keys to the Avengers," Harras said. "They are the world's mightiest heroes. They represent the best of the best. To be an Avenger is a great honor and a great responsibility. When you have a group of heroes who are that powerful and influental, I think that the big event stories flow out of the group."

In the Beginning

Macchio pointed out that **THE AVENGERS** featured major events that effected the Marvel universe right from the beginning of the series. "Even as far back as **AVENGERS #4**, things were happening in the book that changed the universe as the readers knew it. When Captain America returned to life, a link was established between this new upstart company and the comics of the 1940s and '50s. This single issue established a continuity back to World War II and added to Marvel's rich history."

The changes have been nearly constant since then. From the first formation of the Masters of Evil to the Kree-Sh'lar war at the center of "Operation: Galactic Storm," it seems like every time a major event shakes up the status quo, the Avengers are at the center of it. The writers and editors of the Avengers line of comics feel that there are many reasons for the team's presence at these turning points.

"...the big event stories flow out of the group."

Roy Thomas, former editor-in-chief of Marvel Comics, writer of the "Kree-Skrull War" storyline, and current writer of **AVENGERS WEST COAST**, explained that The Avengers were always meant to be the center of the epic stories.

"When Stan created The Avengers, he was looking for an 'all star game' feeling. These were, and are, the most important, powerful and influential characters in the Marvel universe. The best of the best. The Avengers are the heroes that can be pitted against the villain or villains that are just too big for any single hero to handle. The very nature of the team leads to big events occurring."

Bob Harras, current writer of the **AVENGERS** and editor of the X-Men line of comics agreed. "When you're writing a story featuring Earth's mightiest heroes, the stories tend to become grander in scope and bigger in scale in order to fit in all the characters. Also, each of the characters in the group brings with them a history that can be mined for stories."

One of Harras's favorite **AVENGERS** story is Steve Englehart's "Cosmic Madonna" storyline. "What I liked about the the story was that it was a story of people wrapped up in a cosmic saga. The story had a great villain in Immortus/Kang, but the personal stories that went along with it — The Swordsman's relationship with Mantis, and the Scarlet Witch and The Vision getting together, established just the right balance for me. A thing that I think some writers forget with **THE AVENGERS** is the 'people' side. What I'm trying to establish with the epic stories on my run of the book is to place the personal battles each of the characters must face within the constructs of the cosmic tales."

"A good example of what I'm talking about," Harras said, "is the X-Men/Avengers crossover. The story will have far reaching effects on the Marvel Universe. It's a great big adventure will lots of heroes and villains and plenty of action. It brings back Magneto. It shakes up all the teams involved. But its catalyst is one of the smallest and most personal in the heroes' world — Luna. Because, Luna's parents are Quicksilver and Crystal, both the Avengers and the X-Men feel that she is a part of their family. This allows me, as well as the other writers, to explore the interpersonal relationships that the result from the larger story."

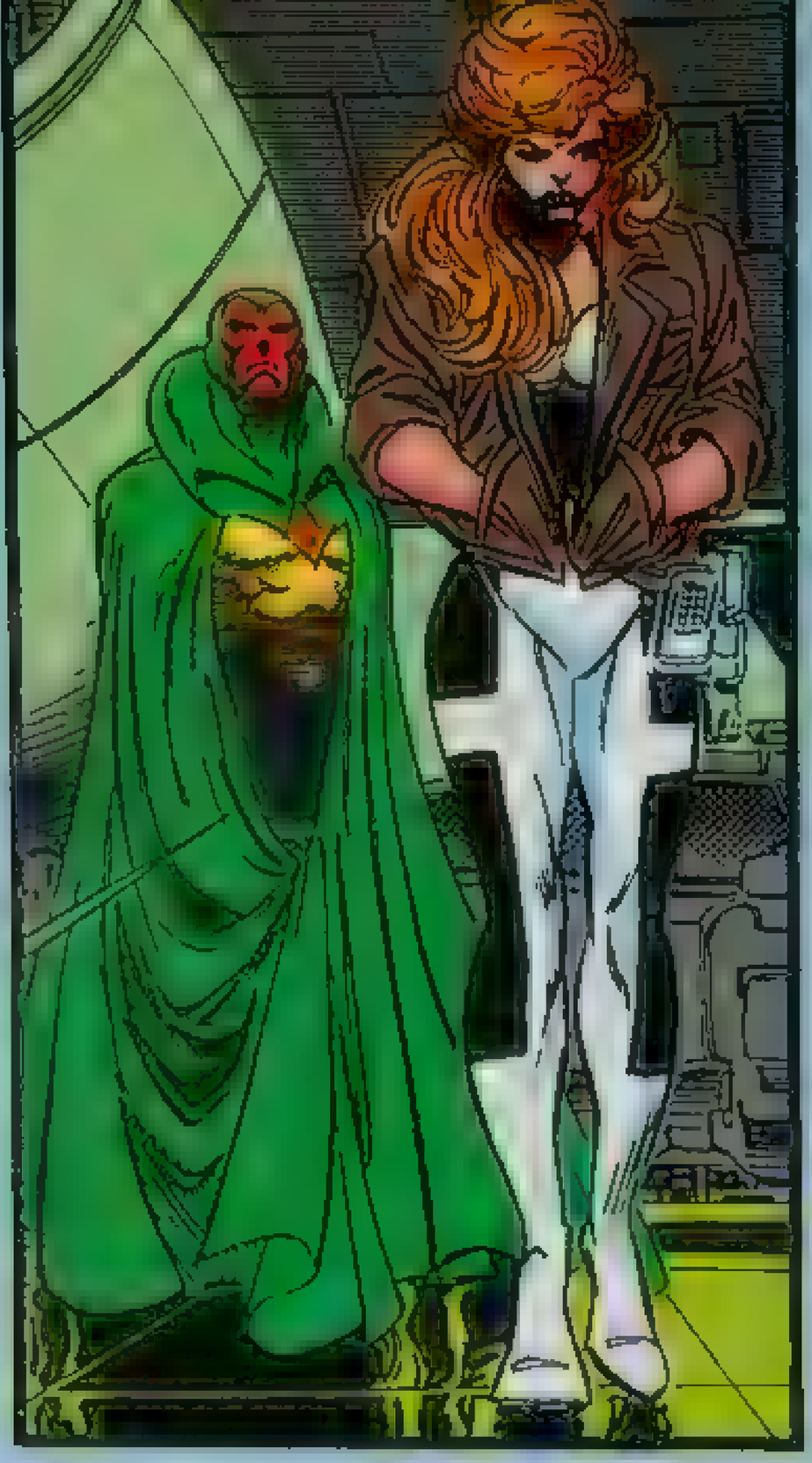
Nel Yomtov, editor of **AVENGERS WEST COAST**, hinted at some of the surprising changes that result from the X-Men/Avengers crossover. "The crossover is very important culminating factor in Avengers and Avengers West Coast history. The west coast team will be coming off a very big event of their own in issue #98-100 of **AVENGERS WEST COAST**, where they have will face Satannish the new Lethal Legion, and Mephisto. This story sets up the changes that are going to occur. Several heroes will leave the team, one will even die. After the battle, the team is in shambles and then they're drawn into the crossover. There is lots of friction between the two Avengers teams and that friction will cause a major rift. The story will culminate with a split between the teams as the Avengers West Coast quit and form their own unit that is unaffiliated with the Avengers."

According to Yomtov, the ideas for this storyline have been in place for quite some time. That it ties in with a major crossover is a happy coincidence. "One of the interesting things about the way most of the major crossovers work as Marvel is that participation is voluntary. We don't say to the creators, 'you have to participate.' However in lots of cases, the stories just beg to have your characters participate."

Thomas agreed. "When I heard what they were doing with the Avengers/X-Men crossover, Nel and I decided to use it as a springboard for the new team. I liked the idea because I like shaking things up."

Thomas is one of the writers best known for shaking things up. His Kree-Skrull War is still the Avengers story that is remembered with the most fondness by many comics creators and readers.

"The odd thing about that story was that it was never called the 'Kree-Skrull War' until after it was over," he noted. "It was just an idea that grew out of my admiration of what Stan and Jack did in the Marvel universe when they made it interrelated. That may not seem like much now, but in the '60s it was a rarity. Stan and Jack were among the first to establish an interconnectiveness between their characters. I'm not talking about Superman and Batman teaming up to fight the Joker and Luthor, because those stories didn't have a lasting effect. I'm talking about things like real alien races that appear in more than one series in the line. Before Stan and Jack there were just kind of generic aliens with no personality or history, but with the introduction of the Kree and the Skrulls we had two real races of aliens with distinct per-



sonalities, customs, and ways of life.

"One characteristic that they shared was that they were both very militaristic," he elaborated. "I drew from this idea to create the story. It only seemed logical to me that at some point these two would meet in space and at that time they would clash. It was a good story, but I think the luckiest break for me was when Neal Adams came on the book for the story. I think that the team of Neal and I took the book to a higher level."

Creators

Another way that a story can become a big event, as stated by Thomas, is when the creative team on the series works together so well that their output gets particular notice. Throughout Avengers history, there have been several teams that have combined to produce big event stories that weren't necessarily designed to be so. Examples are Stan Lee and Jack Kirby on the "Baron Zemo and his Master of Evil" plotline, Thomas and Adams on the "Kree-Skrull War," Jim Shooter and George Prez of the "Korvac Saga," and Gruenwald, Steven Grant, and John Byrne on the "Ch'thon" storyline.

"The Ch'thon story line is *my* all time Avengers big event storyline, because it was never planned to be a big event," said Mark Gruenwald, executive editor of Marvel and writer of Captain America and Quasar. "This kind of story doesn't start out as a 'big event'; its just a regular story in the book, but the ramifications are felt later."

The story involved the Scarlet Witch and Quicksilver's search for their parents. Along the way, they had the first Marvel encounter with the Book of the Darkhold, they battled the High Evolutionary, and Magneto himself became involved.

"The Ch'thon story had a lot of impact in a very contained package," Gruenwald explained. It revealed that Magneto was the father of Wanda and Pietro. It explained a lot of things about the High Evolutionary and his Knights of Wundagore. And it introduced a villain who is now at the center of the Midnight Sons universe, the demon Ch'thon. That's a lot of impact for three issues of a comic book. However I think its not surprising for the **AVENGERS**. The Avengers lend themselves to the stories with far-reaching effects because of the nature of the group."

Who you gonna call?

"The Avengers are a heterogeneous group," Gruenwald said. "They aren't together for a cause, such as Infinity Watch. Nor are they a group of all the same kinds of heroes, like the X-Men, who are mutants. The Avengers are drawn from all over the super hero spectrum. This allows for the personal stakes in virtually any given situation.

"The Avengers motto, 'Once and Avenger, always an Avenger' is vitally important to the group. Because of this motto the team has a network of about 50 heroes who can be called in for any particular mission. They can have mutants, gods, street fighters, World War II vets, immortals, the list goes on and on."

Harras agreed. "On the whole I think what makes the Avengers work is the availability of nearly any character for a story. The Avengers cast is epic, and therefore, so are the their stories."

A good example of the use of the Avengers extensive cast is Operation: Galactic Storm. "With Galactic Storm," Gruenwald said, "we held a conference with all the creators and writers where we went through all of the Avengers and decided which heroes made sense. A character like Captain Marvel, who hasn't been an Avenger for years, was chosen to play a larger role because she had outer space experience, while a character like Black Widow played a small role even though she was part of the current team."

They have the rep

Another reason the Avengers stories seem to have far reaching effect is the team's reputation in the Marvel Universe. "The Avengers are the professionals of the super hero business. They often find themselves called in by the conventional authorities when they wouldn't call in another super group," Gruenwald said.

"The government wouldn't call in the X-Men because they are a 'mutants rights group,' he continued. "They wouldn't call in the Fantastic Four because they are basically a scientist and his adventurer friends. While they have done good things and stopped some criminals, the Fantastic Four is not known as super-peace enforcers in the Marvel universe. They have an eccentric reputation. They have had many public traumas over the years, from The Baxter Building being blown up to the FF going bankrupt. Besides, there are only four of them, and when the authorities want to handle a big menace they think they need a big organization," Gruenwald continued.

Macchio agreed with this line of thinking. "The Avengers are considered the first line of defense against any really large threat anywhere. They're located in this big mansion in midtown New York. They have a very formal charter and an established hierarchy with a chairman, vice chairman, members and reservists. It seems only natural that established authorities would come to the Avengers — they run in a way bureaucrats would understand. Can you imagine the government trying to deal with the X-Men or the Secret Defenders? The Avengers are together because they share a certain sense of duty or commitment.

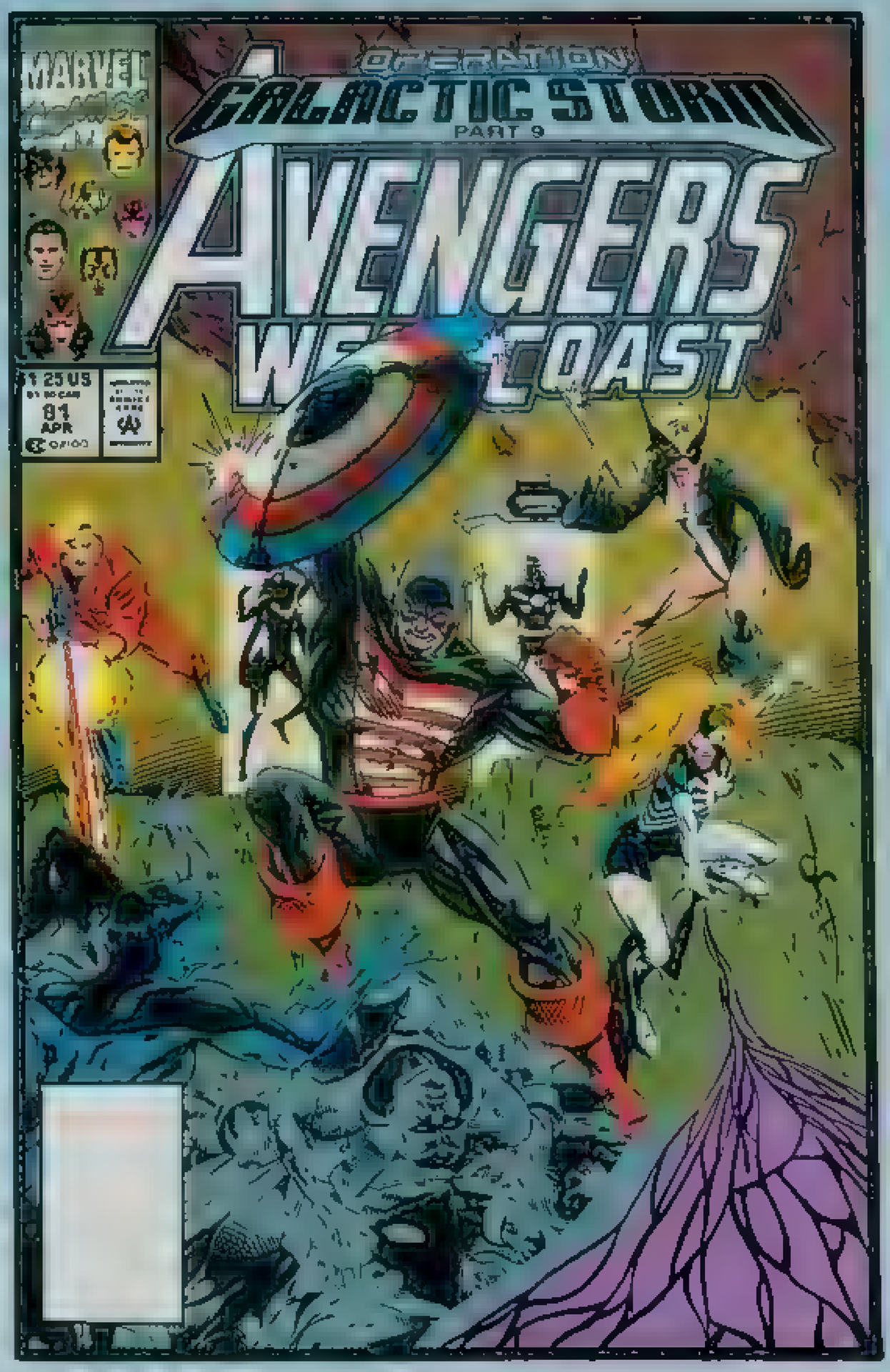
"They are the soldiers. They don't have to be together, they *choose* to be together."

Anatomy of A Crossover:

The Making of "Operation: Galactic Storm"

According to Marvel Comics senior executive editor Mark Gruenwald three things are needed for a successful crossover.
1. A story that has natural connections.
2. A major event that has never been seen before.
3. Lasting consequences

Many of the writers and editors at Marvel feel that one of the best examples of a successful crossover was "Operation: Galactic Storm," which appeared in 19 issues of 7 different comic book titles in the Avengers line. This is how this outstanding event in Avengers history came into being.



"On occasion the editors at Marvel look for 'break-out events' in the Marvel Universe," Mark Gruenwald revealed. "These are stories that are too big to be contained in one series. 'Operation: Galactic Storm' blossomed out of a small storyline in **QUASAR**, which I write. In the story, Quasar was facing a menace too big for him to handle and since, at the time, he was an active Avenger, he automatically went to them for help.

"We were looking for a breakout event and the 'Galactic Storm' story was chosen as the one we would use. If we hadn't chosen it, I would have scaled the story down and it would have lasted a whole lot longer in just **QUASAR**, maybe even a whole year. But once we expanded it to the 19 parts, we got over Quasar's portion of it in 3 issues," he said.

Ralph Macchio, Avengers group editor, continued the tale: "'Galactic Storm' was a perfect crossover for **THE AVENGERS** because, even though the Kree originated in the **FANTASTIC FOUR**, the 'Kree-Skrull War' planted them right in the middle of the Avengers universe. We knew that both Avengers groups could be involved and we could use the story to redefine both groups. It is one of the crossover epics that I am most happy with."

After the story was accepted, Gruenwald, **AVENGERS** writer Bob Harras, and **WONDER MAN** Editor Fabian Nicieza worked up a tight outline as to what would happen in each of the parts. Then Gruenwald, Harras, and Nicieza met with all of the editors and creative teams of the series that would tie in to 'Operation: Galactic Storm.'

"We got together with everybody on this one, and threw out ideas," Macchio said. "Everybody contributed, from writers and pencilers right on down to letterers and colorists. One of the most interesting portions of the summit was choosing [which heroes] would be featured in the team. We felt as if we chose who would participate just like the **AVENGERS** would; we went through each member, both current and past, and chose the team members for their usefulness on the mission. There were some heated debates as to who should go on the mission and who should be left behind, just like what turned up in the story."

What resulted was the multi-part epic that drew the Avengers in the Kree-Sh'iar war, a story that is one of the most popular in Avengers' history. But does it meet with Gruenwald's criteria for a good crossover?

1 - A story that has natural connections

"Without a doubt, 'Operation: Galactic Storm' had natural connections," **AVENGERS WEST COAST** and **IRON MAN** Editor Nel Yomtov said. "The story

revolved around the Avengers. The five parts I edited are some of the books I'm most proud of. I think that 'Galactic Storm' was one of the tightest crossovers we've ever done."

2 - A major event that has never been seen before

"Galactic Storm was descended from of the 'Kree-Skrull War.' We looked at that story and said 'how can we go beyond there? How can we show things that we weren't done in the previous 'super heroes in space' epic.' We took all of the cool things that that story did in 9 parts and we tried to *up* the consequences. In the original, nearly the whole story took place in the vicinity of Earth, so we said the first thing we have to do is have the characters go to the alien worlds and be *proactive*, rather than reactive. This made for a major difference when the heroes actually went to the heads of the Kree and Sh'iar Empires in an official capacity. In the first story the heroes just kind of said, 'Stay away from Earth, please, or we're going to whip you a good one,'" Gruenwald said.

"The outcome was a totally unexpected event," Macchio said. "No one suspected we would really destroy the Kree homeworld and decimate the race itself."

3 - Lasting consequences

"With the explosion of the nega-bomb during 'Galactic Storm,' not only did it alter Kree history for all time, its changed things for the Avengers. It caused Cap to rethink his role on the team and to actually leave them for a while, and it put the team on the Kree's hit list, because they are blamed for what happened," Gruenwald said.

"In fact the next major storyline in **THE AVENGERS** after they wrap-up the Avengers/X-Men crossover and finish off Proctor and the Gatherers, will be the Kree Strike Force attempting to avenge the death of the Supreme Intelligence by killing The Avengers. Now that's lasting consequences," Macchio said.

In conclusion, Macchio said, " 'Operation: Galactic Storm' seemed to work on many different levels. It sustained itself all the way to the end. It shook up the Avengers and made each of the members question their place in the team."

Gruenwald added, "I think that this type of crossover is the hardest to do. It's one thing to do an 'Infinity Crusade' in which the bulk of the story will be told in a limited series, and the related stories just hang out on the side. Its another thing to develop the throughline for the story in multiple titles in which you really have to follow the entire run in order to get the story. We get letters from people who like both concepts, that's why we do both ideas. I think that we do them both very successfully, too."

Randy Meredith travels in a wide variety of artistic circles in the course of his job as publications director for the Columbus (Ohio) Museum of Art and as a frequent contributor to MARVEL AGE MAGAZINE

The following is a list of some of the expansive and pivotal events in Avengers' history, including the comic or comics in which each appeared:

Event	Comic
Return of Captain America	Avengers 4
Baron Zemo and the Masters of Evil	Avengers 6-16
The Kree-Skrull War	Avengers 89-97
The Avengers vs. The Defenders	Avengers 115-118 Defenders 8-11
The Celestial Madonna	Avengers 129-135 Giant Size Avengers 2-4
The Korvac Saga	Avengers 168-171
Ch'thon	Avengers 185-187
Acts of Vengeance	Avengers 311-313 Avengers West Coast 53-55 Avengers Spotlight 26-28 Captain America 365-367 Damage Control II 1-4 Fantastic Four 334-336 Iron Man 250-252 Thor 411-413 Quasar 5-6
Operation: Galactic Storm	Avengers 345-347 Avengers West Coast 80-82 Captain America 398-400 Iron Man 278-279 Quasar 34-36 Thor 445-446 Wonder Man 7-9

PRO FILES

— Jaye Gardner

Roy Thomas

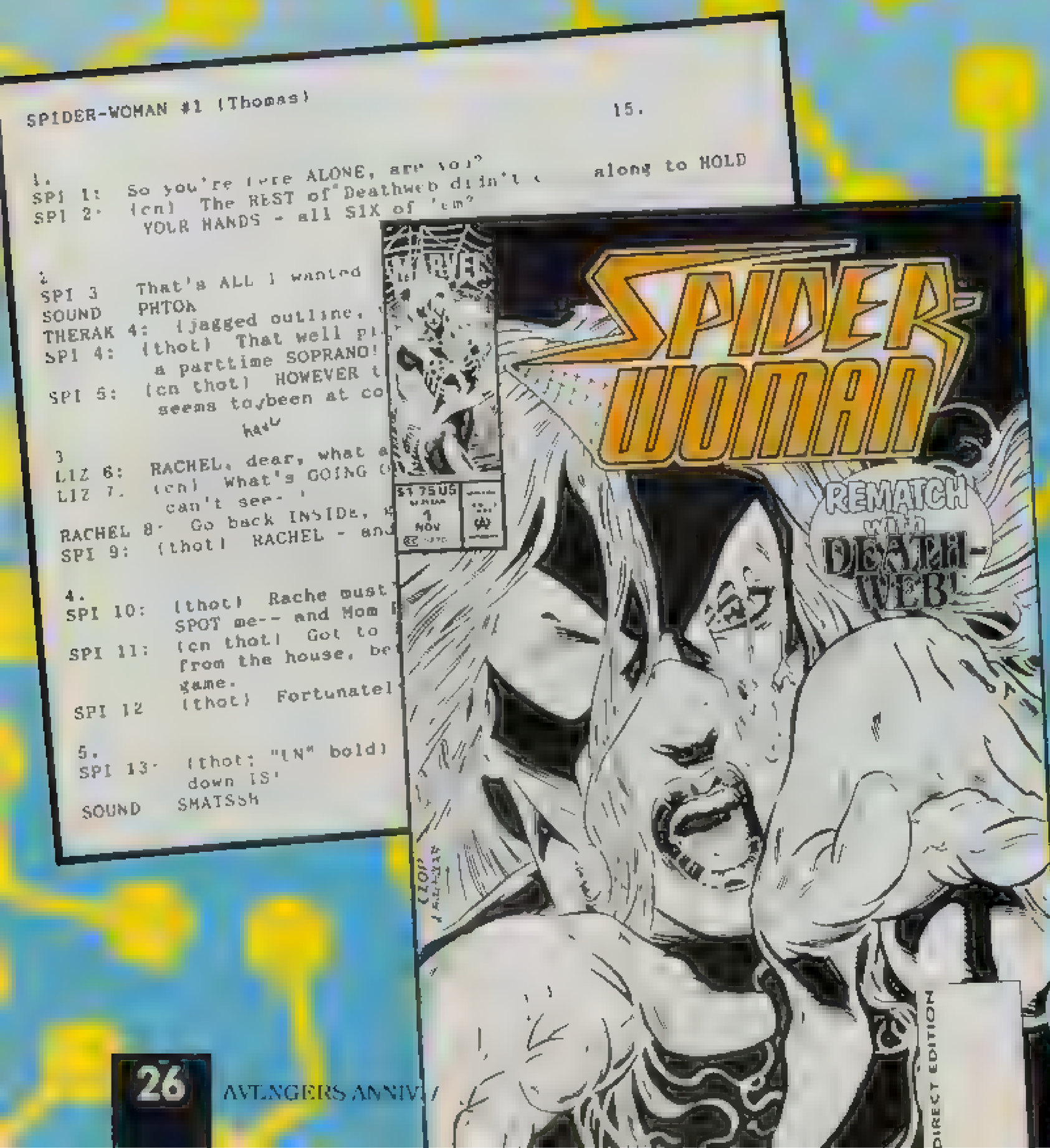
Creative, experienced, and disciplined — all aptly describe writer Roy Thomas and his thirty year career in comic books.

Entering the field via an independent comic book fanzine, *Alter Ego*, Roy worked there as an assistant editor from 1961 to 1964, then became editor in 1965. His efforts caught the attention of Editor Mort Weisinger at DC Comics. After contacting Roy in Jackson, Missouri, Mort offered Roy a job, which he graciously accepted and relocated to New York City. Two weeks later, Stan Lee met Roy and counter-offered him an on-staff writing position at Marvel Comics.

For the next fifteen years, Roy worked almost exclusively for Marvel. Scripting such titles as **MILLIE THE MODEL** and **PATSY AND HEDI**, Roy first delved into romance and light adventure comics. Shortly thereafter, he scripted various issues of **IRON MAN** and **DR. STRANGE** before landing a job as regular writer of **SGT. FURY AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS**. "On a majority of the books I began to write," Roy recalled, "I was the first writer to take over after Stan Lee. I took over **UNCANNY X-MEN** with issue #20, and later the **AVENGERS** with issue #35. It's always hard to follow a good act. Stan set new standards for comic book writing. It was a challenge to keep up his standards and ensure that they were the same characters he wrote."

In 1970, Roy played an instrumental role in bringing Conan the Barbarian to Marvel. With Stan's permission, Roy contacted the estate of Robert E. Howard, Conan creator and author, and within the year, Roy was hard at work bringing Conan to life in the pages of **CONAN THE BARBARIAN**. "Barry (Windsor) Smith was the first artist, when it was originally supposed to be John Buscema," Roy reveals. "The publisher decided they were paying a lot of money for the Conan rights and they would save money by hiring Barry over John. John was too expensive." During his last few issues of **CONAN**, Roy acquired a collaborator — his wife, Dannette Thomas. "Dann started helping me co-plot about thirteen years ago. She's not someone who grew up reading comics. Her ideas can be really innovative." Now that the original Conan series is coming to a close, Roy has been slated to relaunch Conan in the new title: **CONAN THE ADVENTURER**, which takes Conan back to his younger days.

Reflecting on his career, Roy is amazed at how much — and how little — things have changed. "I think in some ways, you're fresher when you start. Then, of course, you learn more as you go, use techniques that you've acquired. But writing comics in general has changed, along with the comics field. Originally, I imitated Stan Lee's way of writing, which was a little more melodramatic, less realistic. I haven't deliberately set out to make any style changes. Some books I write lighter than I used to, others I write as I always have. You change over a period of years. You're a little less young, maybe a little less close to your audience's age, but you still have the same interest in adventure and fantasy."



THE AVENGERS CHARTER

LEGACY OF LEGENDS

BE IT KNOWN...

That we, the Avengers, have banded together to protect and safeguard the Planet Earth, its inhabitants and resources, from any and all threats — terrestrial or otherwise — which are, or might proves to be, beyond the power of conventional forces to handle.

That we shall brook no interference in the growth of mankind in meeting its rightful destiny.

That we dedicate ourselves to the establishment, growth, and preservation of peace, liberty, equality, and justice under law.

This is our solemn oath.

With those fateful words, and the charter that followed them, the Avengers took their place as Earth's foremost Super-Team — a *professional* team.

"The Avengers are the pre-eminent team in the Marvel Universe," Executive Editor Mark Gruenwald explained. "The team with the most respectability, the greatest mystique — they're not just playing games!

"These are beings with *very* high standards of behavior — and those are the standards they set forth in their charter," he continued. "The founders, Iron Man, Thor, Wasp, Ant Man, even the Hulk, saw the Avengers as more than just a team. It was also a sort of legacy — something that would continue beyond their involvement."

"Something that would live beyond them."

"The Charter was a way to put their principles down on paper, pass them along to future generations of Avengers." He

laughed. "Of course, in the *real* world, there were other reasons for its creation. At story conferences, questions kept coming up about how the Avengers operated. We'd always spend time talking about what the group would do in certain situations, when would they call in the Fantastic Four, for example, or when would they decide they needed substitutes.

"The Charter was a way to put their principles down on paper..."

"It was all a question of SOP's (Standard Operating Procedures), something all big groups have in place as a matter of course. Roger Stern (then writer of the **AVENGERS**) decided to spell them out, get them on paper as a sort of speculation, and what he did became the original Avengers charter."

Roger Stern remembered it a little differently:

"It's been so long, but I remember that Mark (Gruenwald) gave me a lot of notes to build on — he *asked* me to do it. I'd just taken over as regular scripter on **THE AVENGERS**, and there was an annual in the works. They wanted to run a feature on the Charter in the back — it was time to spell things out. Mark had already done a lot of research into the thing, so I took his notes and added *my* two cents."

He went on: "You see, any organization, for various legal purposes, *has* to have a charter that sets out their goals — what they intend to do. The specifics of how those goals are to be met are spelled out in the bylaws. That's what the piece in the **AVENGERS** ANNUAL was to be about. So I took Mark's notes, added in what I knew of Avengers history, and the details the charter would need to work, and ... there it was!

"It allows the Avengers to be recognized as a legally-founded organization, for purposes of cooperating with other, established, law-enforcement organizations: the New York Police Department, Interpol, the FBI — not to mention dealing with governments, the United Nations, whoever."

Of course, as time passed, the Avengers, and the world they live in, changed, until ..

"There's a new charter now," Gruenwald noted, "one that internationalizes the team. It's all Larry Hama's doing."

"When Larry came in to write **THE AVENGERS**, he decided that the old charter didn't really make sense in terms of the scope of Avenger operations. The team seemed to be doing things entirely undreamed of in their charter. Larry thought it would be a good idea to change the charter, update it, especially in the areas the group's adventures were leading them into. He saw differences between the activities that were going on and what the charter said were *supposed* to go on — and they bothered him."

"That's right," Larry Hama confirmed. "There are things in comics that impinge on the real world, and when they're wrong, that just bothers me. As a writer, I ask questions: How can these guys just go across a border and do this stuff? Are they liable to lawsuits? That kind of thing. When I took the **AVENGERS**, I asked to see the charter, and found that a lot of it was kind of outdated. So here I was, working on the seventh or eighth reorganization of the Avengers, and I had all this stuff that already existed on paper, but a lot of it was useless for various weird political reasons.

"There are things in comics that impinge on the real world, and when they're wrong, that just bothers me."

"After all, what's the use of having all these powers if you can't, say, cross the border into Canada?" he questioned.

"So I figured we should revise the charter, change it so it fit into the *real* world," (he laughed) "if the real world had people who could fly and have beams come out of their eyes!"

"I wrote this backstory," Hama continued. "Which basically said that in secret arms limitations talks between the

US and the Soviet Union, the Avengers were used as a bargaining chip. After all, they *were* a very powerful force administered by America's National Security Council and were getting special privileges from the Federal Government.

"So in this agreement, the US government disentangled themselves from the Avengers — leaving them on their own."

"Two days after the announcement, the Avengers are approached by a special committee of the United Nations, and offered a deal — if the Avengers charter is amended to allow for an international membership, the U.N. will 'adopt' the Avengers as a special unit of its peacekeeping force," Hama elaborated.

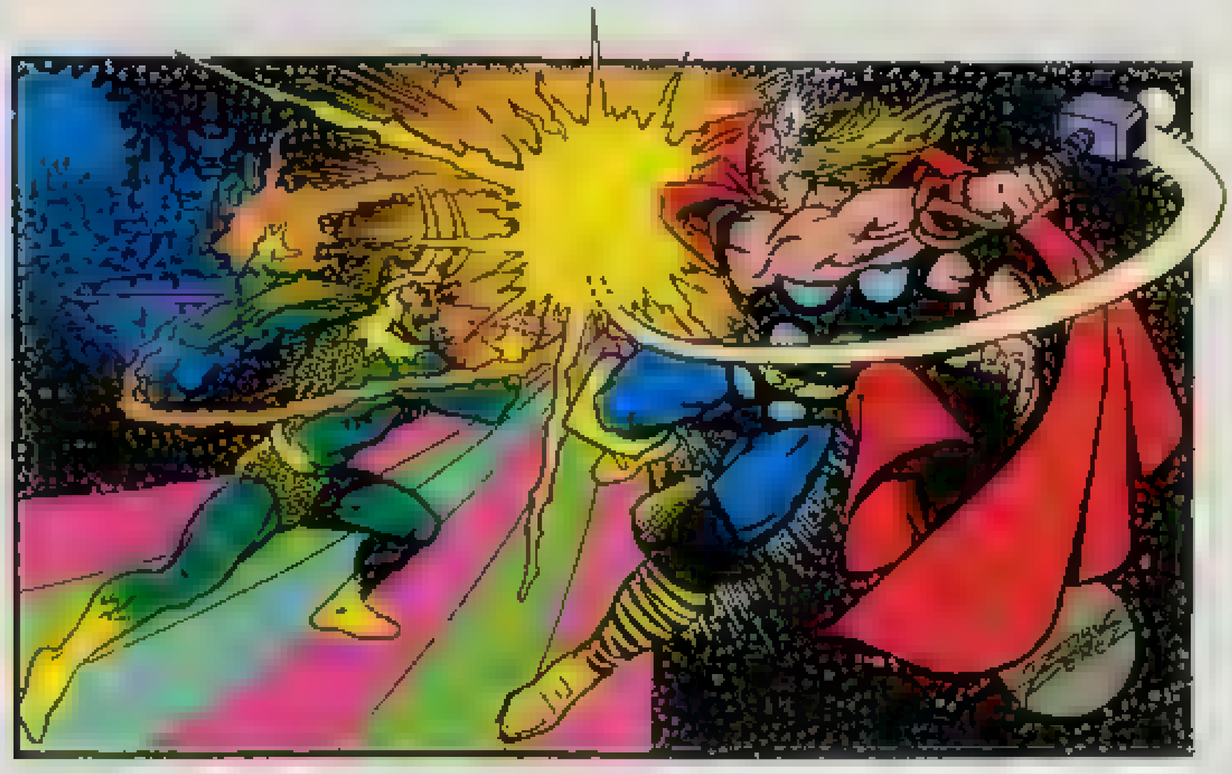
"All this let us internationalize things, so that characters who weren't American Citizens and so on and so forth could become members."

And what about the fact that some members of the Avengers are gods?

"Well," Hama quickly points out. "The thing is, they're not. At least, not gods as we think of them."

He pauses, thinking. "Gods in the Marvel Universe are quote — small "g" gods — unquote. They are beings of a different plane, rather then deities who depend on worship to exist. Son of Satan is *not* the Devil, Mephistopheles is *not* Lucifer the fallen Angel, the Demons who exist in the Marvel Universe are not part of the Judeo-Christian cosmos."

He paused again. "And, of course, the thing about the elder Norse and Hellenic Gods, is that they were a *lot* more human and approachable than the Judeo-Christian God. They interacted with humanity, they had *kids* with humans! They had *very* human faults. And they weren't pre-ordaining stuff, it just happened! It's not as if those guys were causing things to happen. In a way it's wrong to



call them Gods. From our cultural standpoint — it's a misnomer!"

So, Thor and Hercules weren't a problem in logic — but why work so hard to rewrite the charter?

"The Charter is *important* to the Avengers," Hama was quick to point out. "It makes them something more than just vigilantes. That is its main purpose — it ensures against the Avengers being just a group of total civilians operating outside the law.

"When we amended the charter to handle that, to take care of those basic needs, giving the Avengers a certain amount of deputorial power and the ability to exercise it *wherever* it was needed, my main worries were resolved. But in reading and working on the charter, I discovered other things that I needed to clear up," he continued, "like the way reserve Avengers were handled (Section 2, Paragraph D, Clause 3, part a).

> "After all, what's the use of having all these powers if you can't, say, cross the border into Canada?"

"The whole thing about subbing is taken from union charters — for example, in the musicians union, if you can't show up for a job, you have to provide a substitute, but once you provide that substitute, assuming he shows up and does the job, there's nothing they can do to you! A lot of unions work that way."

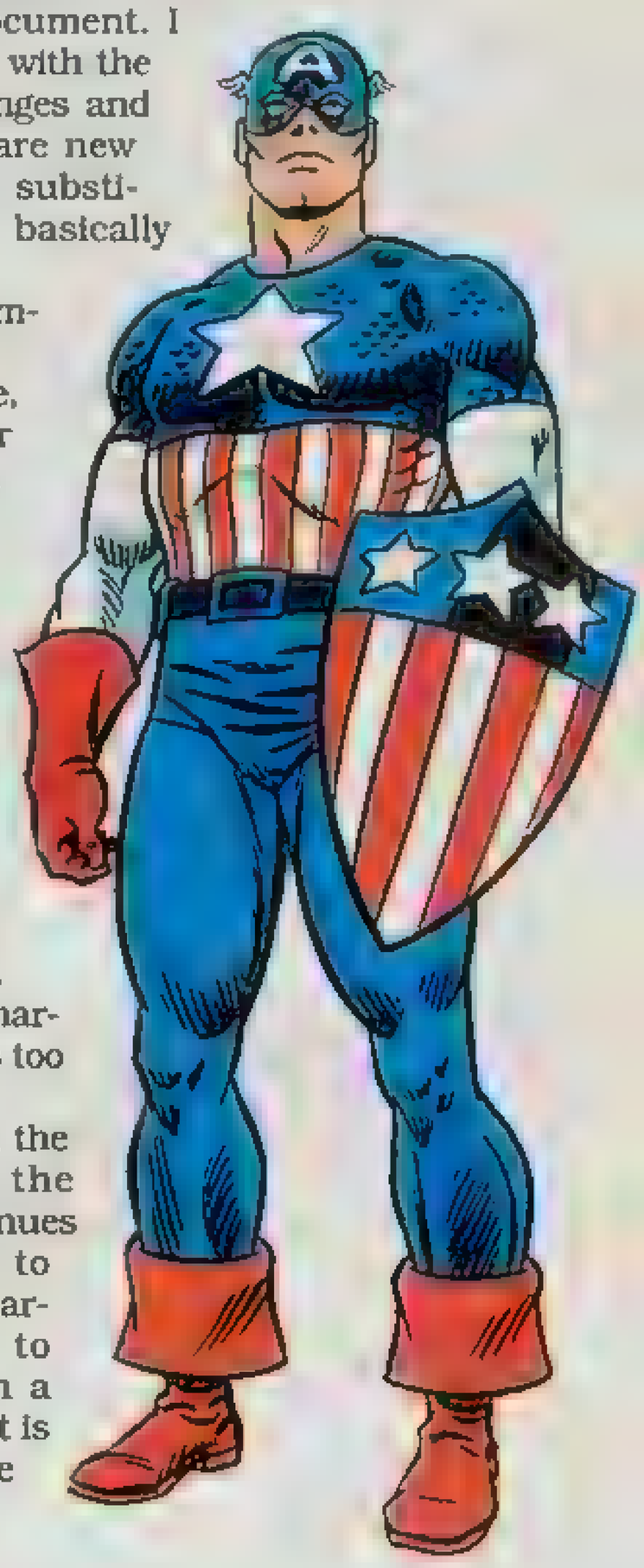
He explained, "I figured the Avengers should work in the same way. It adds another level of responsibility, makes every member more responsible to the team. I guess, basically, I see the charter as a *deus ex machina* device. Its origins had to be vague enough that it could cover all those things — it's basically a cover, rather than a solid document, although I did have a *real* charter in front of me when I did it — I can't remember whose it was, but it was a real document. I took that, and combined it with the old charter and made changes and added addendum. There are new rules about quorums and substitutes and things, but it's basically the same document.

"And now, at least *I'm* comfortable with it."

Larry may be comfortable, but the Avengers, and their charter, have never stood still. They've grown, and matured, through their years of service. And today ...

"Well, of course," Mark Gruenwald reminded, "Larry is no longer on the book, and I don't know how the new team is treating the charter. I don't really know if they're using it or considering it or not. Maybe there'll be a new charter with the new team — it's too early to tell."

Old, new, still unwritten, the Avengers charter, like the Avengers themselves, continues to move forward. Molded to the changing world, the charter allows the Avengers to evolve, yet still maintain a link to their glorious past. It is a living document — one that reflects the life of the world — and the team, around it.



Doug Murray, co-creator of The 'Nam, *has been covering the fantasy/science-fiction/comics beat ever since his early days with* Famous Monsters of Filmland. *He is a regular contributor to* MARVEL AGE *and various special magazine projects. His other Marvel credits include* MERC, THE WAR, *and the* HEARTS AND MINDS *graphic novel.*

THE AVENGERS CHARTER

ARTICLE ONE: ORGANIZATION

The Avengers is hereby chartered as a peace-keeping force of the security arm of the United Nations answerable only to the Security Council.

Headquarters shall be in New York City and there shall be established facilities for the use of the Avengers in the current eleven member nations of the Security Council.

ARTICLE TWO: JURISDICTION

The Avengers, as a group, are enpowered to act as an agency of enforcement on duly recognized and approved missions in all lands, territories and protectorates of member states of the United Nations, providing that the threat in question is super-powered, extra-terrestrial, extra-dimensional, sub-terranean, sub-oceanic, or occult, and engaged in an invasion, infestation, limited incursion, piracy, enchantment or any flagrant violation of international law not instigated, sanctioned, or abetted by a member nation.

ARTICLE THREE: FUNDING

Major funding for the major operations of the Avengers—for upkeep of the New York headquarters, transportation, and equipment shall be provided by a grant from the Maria Stark Foundation—Anthony Stark, Director—with the understanding that the Foundation shall have no say in Avengers operations, policy, membership or the deployment of funds within the Avengers organization.

The stipends to serving members and active and inactive reserve members shall be drawn from the major pool of United Nations funding.

Costs for construction, maintenance, and staffing of subsidiary headquarters shall be absorbed by the host countries.

ARTICLE FOUR: OPERATIONS

The day-to-day operations of the Avengers shall be governed by a set of bylaws as put forth by the founding members.

AVENGERS bylaws

SECTION ONE: POLICY AND OPERATIONS

A: All Avengers shall, at all times, endeavor to adhere to the principles of the Avengers Charter and follow the rules and regulations of these bylaws.

1. The bylaws may be amended, when necessary, by the active members of the Avengers. Amendments may be proposed by any active Avenger. Amendments shall become a binding part of these bylaws upon approval by two-thirds of the active membership.

1a. Active membership shall be further defined to mean the seven serving members of the primary team and their seven specific reserve substitutes.

B. No Avenger shall be required to surrender knowledge of his or her civilian identity or personal affairs to the membership at large or the United Nations Security Council.

C. The Avengers shall be led by a duly elected chairbeing. It shall be the duty of this leader to coordinate all Avenger activities whether business or tactical in nature.

1. The position of Chairbeing shall be open to any active member who has passed his/her probationary period (see Section Two—Membership).
2. The Chairbeing shall serve for a term of one year, with no limit to the number of successive terms a leader may serve.
3. It shall be a privilege of the Chairbeing to determine the format of meetings and to call special meetings as he/she sees fit.
4. In the event of the absence, incapacity or resignation of the Chairbeing, an interim leader shall be chosen by a two-thirds vote of the active membership.
5. In the event of incapacity or death during action, chairbeingship shall pass in orderly succession among the primary team in a predetermined chain of command arrived at by majority vote among the primary team.

SECTION TWO: MEMBERSHIP

A. Recognizing that the membership of the Avengers may be subject to, and, indeed, might profit from change, procedures for the addition of members shall be set forth.

B. Candidates for membership in the Avengers must be legal adults, possessing at least one skill, power, ability, or talent which is deemed valuable by a majority of the active membership.

1. Membership shall not be denied on account of race, color, creed, sex, or condition of birth or origin.
2. Candidates for membership must be nominated by one active member in good standing at a regular or special meeting Election for membership must be held within one week of nomination and be attended by a simple majority of active members. A two-thirds vote is necessary for election to membership.
3. Newly-elected Avengers shall serve a probationary period of not less than six months.
   - **a.** During the probationary period, a special committee consisting of one primary team member, one reserve substitute, and two members of the Avengers support crews shall investigate the candidate's public record for any violations, breaches of trust, or depredations, legal or moral, which may preclude said candidate from assumption of full active status.
   - **b.** While on probation, the new Avenger shall have limited access to Avengers facilities and records.
   - **c.** At the end of probation, the new Avenger shall assume full active status, unless objections are raised by any active member, or by the United Nations Security Council.

C. The Avengers shall select new members whenever the Chairbeing or two-thirds of the active membership determines that the ranks are not at optimal strength, or when there is a vacancy in the ranks.

1. It shall be the prerogative of the Chairbeing to limit the number of active members.

D. Active Avengers shall be the designation given to those Avengers who are full-time members.

1. Active Avengers shall be required to log all individual cases into the main computer file, that the entire membership may benefit from the individual's experience.
2. Active Avengers shall be required to attend all regular business meetings. Members who miss more than one meeting per month without submitting an acceptable excuse may face suspension for a period to be determined by a consensus of the other active members. (See Paragraph G)
3. Active Avengers shall be issued an Avengers identification card and an emergency signal device.

a. Active Avengers shall be required to meet all CALLS TO ASSEMBLE. If unable to respond, the active Avenger must notify that specific member's reserve substitute. Failure to respond coupled with failure to notify the reserve substitute is grounds for immediate suspension of privileges and must be dealt with by a tribunal of all active members.
b. Active members who miss an emergency call without good reason may be subject to disciplinary action.

4. Active Avengers shall be expected to cooperate with other law enforcement agencies. Although granted certain legal immunities by the Avengers priority clearance, no Avenger shall be considered above the law.
5. Active Avengers shall be paid a stipend of one thousand dollars ($1000) per week. Members may choose not to accept their stipends, in which case the money shall be placed into their retirement fund.
   a. Active members shall be entitled to free medical and life insurance benefits.
   b. Active members shall be provided with private quarters where they, if so choosing, may reside. Unlimited meal privileges shall be provided for live-in members.
6. Active Avengers shall be granted unlimited access to the Avengers Mansion headquarters, vehicles, computer records files, and any other facilities of the organization.
7. Active Avengers shall, at all times, act in a manner befitting that of a guardian of the public trust.

E. Reserve Avengers shall be the designation given to those Avengers who are part-time members, on call for special missions or emergency assignments only.
1. Reserve membership shall be limited to those members who have fulfilled an active term of duty of not less than one year, and who wish to cut back their connections with the group.
2. Reserve Avengers shall not be required to log their individual cases, though they shall be encouraged to do so.
3. Reserve Avengers may attend any regular meeting, but shall be required to attend no more than one per year.
4. Reserve Avengers shall retain their Avengers identification card and emergency signal device.
   a. Reserve members may be demoted to inactive status if they fail to answer three consecutive emergency calls.
5. Reserve Avengers shall be paid a stipend of one hundred dollars ($100) per month.
6. Reserve Avengers shall have limited access to Avengers Mansion, files, equipment, etc.
7. Reserve Avengers may return to active status at the discretion of the Chairbeing, if they so petition and are accepted by majority vote of the active members.
8. Reserve Avengers shall be given priority over new candidates in the filling of vacancies in the active membership.
9. Reserve Avengers may retire to inactive status by notifying the Chairbeing and surrendering the Avengers identification card and emergency signal device.
10. Reserve Avengers shall not have a vote in Avengers proceedings.
11. Reserve Avengers shall have the authority to call emergency meetings.

F. Inactive Avenger shall be the designation given to any member who has retired or resigned from active and reserve duty.
1. Any Avenger may resign by simply notifying the Chairbeing of his/her intent and surrendering his/her Avengers identification card, emergency signal device, and any other Avengers-owned equipment.
2. Any active or reserve Avenger who is incapacitated or who moves from the organization's normal jurisdiction shall be granted an honorable discharge and placed on the inactive roster.
3. Inactive Avengers may be granted limited access to Avengers equipment and facilities only at the discretion of the active members.
4. Inactive status shall be considered the same as an indefinite leave of absence.
5. Inactive Avengers may be reinstated only if there is a vacancy in the active ranks, and then only if elected by a two-thirds vote of the active membership.

G. Motions for disciplinary action against any active or reserve Avenger may be brought by any other active Avenger.
1. In the event of such an accusation, the Chairbeing shall convene a board of inquiry, comprising a simple majority of the active membership (minus the accuser, if he/she is an active member).
2. Disciplinary action shall be limited to suspension, with the option of further trying the accused before a tribunal of all active members.
   a. Tribunal processing shall be conducted in the manner of a military court-martial.
   b. Maximum punishment to be brought on the accused by such a tribunal shall be expulsion from the Avengers.
   c. A two-thirds vote shall be necessary to expel a member from the Avengers.
3. Active and reserve Avengers may be expelled, with no possibility of reinstatement, on the following grounds:
   a. Conviction for any crime above a misdemeanor.
   b. Deliberate betrayal of Avengers classified information.
   c. Criminal acts of negligence not convicted for, but witnessed by at least one active member.

SECTION THREE: MEETINGS

A. The Avengers shall meet regularly, at least once a week, at a time and place to be agreed upon by a simple majority of the active membership.
B. Emergency meetings may be called at any time, but emergency meetings shall not be considered a replacement for a regular meeting.
C. In the event that an Avenger mission is in progress at the time of a regularly-scheduled meeting, the meeting will be rescheduled.
D. A simple majority of the active membership shall be required to make a meeting official.

SECTION FOUR: PUNISHMENT OF CRIMINALS

A. Avengers shall leave the punishment of perpetrators of criminal activity to the appropriate agencies of the law.
B. The Avengers shall not abridge an accused's right to a fair and speedy trial.
C. The Avengers shall abide by the decisions of the law, and will not take upon themselves any aspect of the punishment process.
D. In the event that conventional imprisonment proves inadequate for a given criminal, the Avengers shall be allowed to hold said criminals in a manner they see fit, provided that a full report of said method of imprisonment is given to the proper law enforcement authorities.

SECTION FIVE: AFFILIATIONS

The Avengers shall maintain open and reciprocal relations — including joint limited access to computer data — with the Fantastic Four, Inc. and the Supreme Headquarters International Espionage Law-Enforcement Division.

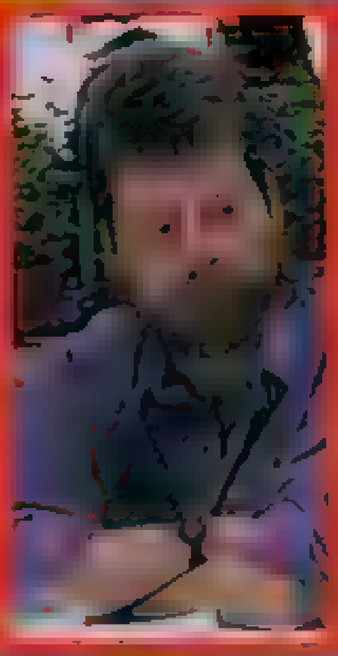
SECTION SIX: SECURITY

All Avenger files shall be open to the scrutiny of a special watchdog committee of the United Nations Security Council and no Avenger may refuse to answer any question posed by a member of that committee, other than those that would reveal that member's secret identity or compromise the security of that member's native country.

SECTION SEVEN: DISCORPORATION

The Avengers organization may be disbanded only by order of the United Nations Security Council for a breach of International Security, or by unanimous vote of the entire active membership of the Avengers. In the event of disbanding, all Avengers properties and facilities shall revert to the Maria Stark Foundation and/or Stark International with the exception of any devices, properties, analysis systems, or data which have any bearing on U.N. Security. Said materials and data shall be immediately turned over to the United Nations Security Council.

PRO FILES



Ross Dzon

— Jaye Gardner

Creative teams don't *always* work well together. In fact, it can be rather difficult to find compatible penciliers and inkers.

That isn't the case for **AVENGERS WEST COAST** penciler Dave Ross and inker Tim Dzon. They have been working together for nearly 30 issues, a feat almost unheard of in the comics field today. Together, they have brought the **AVENGERS WEST COAST** to new levels of recognition.

Attending Sheridan College, one of two illustrious animation schools in North America, Dave set his sights on a career in film animation. His first brush with success was working on the feature film *Rock 'n Rule* for Canada's Nelvana Animation in 1980. In the following years, Dave swayed away from animation and toward illustration, extrapolating information from Andrew Loomis's *Figure Drawing*. Dave quickly learned the fundamentals of drawing and illustration. To this day, he still praises the merits of Loomis's book and recommends it to anyone interested in penciling.

THAT, MY DEAR SCARLET WITCH--
UH-OH
...SHOULD BE THE VERY LEAST OF YOUR CONCERNS!
MEPHISTO!
MERELY PASSING THROUGH, ARE WE, ON THE WAY TO SATANNISH'S BACK DOOR?
MAYBE WE COULD'VE PICKED A BETTER DETOUR..
LET US BY, MEPHISTO! THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU.
AU CONTRAIRE-- IT HAS EVERYTHING TO DO WITH ME!
FROM WHOSE REALM DO YOU THINK MY DEMONIC ALTER EGO STOLE THE FOUR SOULS HE TURNED INTO HIS LETHAL LEGION?

Before landing his first full time assignment on **ALPHA FLIGHT** after John Byrne left, he worked with writer Roy Thomas for the first time on *Last Days of the Justice Society* for DC Comics. Coincidently, once again it was departures, of John Byrne then Paul Ryan, which provided Dave with his successful run on **AVENGERS WEST COAST**. "Paul called me up when he knew that he was leaving the book and suggested that I talk to Roy Thomas and Editor Howard Mackie, so I did. The rest is history," according to Dave.

The only difficulty Dave finds with penciling comics is learning how to condense. "Sometimes, you have to condense and edit plots yourself. You have to prune them down, then get approval from your writer and editor. What I learned at Sheridan is, 'if you have to prune anything, start with whatever doesn't advance the plot.'"

Tim Dzon, on the other hand, doesn't need to worry about pruning down the plot. He is more concerned with consistency and keeping in tune with Dave's pencils. "Dave and I aren't trying to emulate any of the 'hot' artists," Tim pointed out. "We want to be noted for our own individual style rather than the imitation of someone else's. My style lives off the feedback and response of editors, penciliers, other inkers, and even the fans. I believe art is a changing medium, and never stagnant. Feedback is always good to receive."

Dave and Tim are very happy with their run on **AVENGERS WEST COAST**. They, along with Roy Thomas, have taken the Avengers to the forefront of super heroism and delved into the minds of innovative characters like U.S Agent and Spider-Woman. Before their run is over, some very astonishing events will occur. "The current storyline is really exciting," admitted Tim. "A lot is going to happen before the series ends, like the 100th issue and the death of one of the characters. It's the stuff fans should really go for."

Force Works Team

PRO FILES

— Jaye Gardner

Sometimes, good things *do* come to an end, and sometimes, an ending is only the beginning. **AVENGERS WEST COAST** is canceled with issue #102, but Iron Man, Scarlet Witch, Spider-Woman, and U.S.Agent aren't going to roll over and play dead. In fact, they will have much more of an "in your face" attitude as they head up a new group called **FORCE WORKS**, courtesy of writers Andy Lanning and Dan Abnett, and debuting penciler Thomas Tenney.

FORCE WORKS isn't the first time Andy and Dan have collaborated on a project together. The first time was the highly successful "Eurohit" saga in the pages of **THE PUNISHER**. Response was so phenomenal that they decided to collaborate on other projects like Epic's **MUTATIS**, the **SCARLET WITCH** Limited Series, and Marvel UK's **BATTLETIDE: DEATH'S HEAD II vs. KILLPOWER.**

"Initially, we talk things through in a very animated fashion and bang out story ideas," Dan recalled. "Then, we have a much more in depth and complicated conversation for which we take notes and map out plot structure. This is all recorded on scribble bits of paper, then typed up. I tend to dialogue the end results. Andy has a tendency to produce stronger plots. He initiates a project and I finish it off."

Andy's strong sense of storytelling originates from his artistic background. Having penciled "cartoony" books such as **GHOSTBUSTERS** and **SLEEZE BROTHERS**, he prefers inking much more. He is currently the regular inker over Salvador LaRoca on **DEATH'S HEAD II**, and is inking over Bryan Hitch on a Punisher/Death's Head II bookshelf comic. "I enjoy inking the most," Andy admitted. "I get to go further with it than if I were penciling, because of my cartoony style. With writing, I tend to think in pitches and sequences. I tend to be the whirlwind ideas person and leave the scripting to Dan."

Rounding out the **FORCE WORKS** team is penciling newcomer Thomas Tenney. Previously working on **ROBOTECH** for Comico and **TERMINATOR** for Now Comics, Thomas took a two year leave of absence from comics to work for **SFX** (Sports and Fantasy Extra) magazine as an art director and, later, editor. Thomas attributes his comeback to a meeting with artist Gene Colan at a comic convention. Thomas recalled, "I showed Gene my work and he showed me direction. He gave me a new outlook within the industry and sparked my interest back up. He's the best tour guide anyone could have." Thomas is back and with a vengeance, which is more than appropriate to **FORCE WORKS**. "I'm trying to apprpach the book in the same way Frank Miller approached **DAREDEVIL**. I'm trying to make this a moodier book, including a lot of emotion, a lot of power in terms of characterization and interpretation, evening out the art with the story itself. It's like, 'here are the Avengers that would kick down the door. Now here are the Avengers that will kick down the door and make you eat it!'"

Both Andy and Dan agreed that **FORCE WORKS** appeals to them because of its harder edged anti-hero qualities. The group decides to not simply react to violence but try to prevent it before it's begun. Through *force*, these ex-Avengers *work* under a different code of ethics, and given Dan and Andy's affinity for characters like the Punisher and Death's Head II, and Thomas's crisp and powerful pencils, **FORCE WORKS** couldn't be in better hands.

IRON MAN #298. Still controlling his armor telepathically, Tony Stark comes up against the new subterranean powerhouse Earthmover who, like the Mole Man, is a sympathetic antagonist in dire need of an attitude adjustment and a tan. Iron Man and Earthmover clash — jarringly — over which is the true threat to the West Coast's fragile crust, the probing by Stark's California geological stations or Earthmover's subsequent unfettered rampage.

As the plot builds toward issue #300, which will be a 64-page special replete with red and gold foil cover, Stark discovers that it is in fact his old thermal-powered nemesis Ultimo who has put California in jeopardy, and he's raring to give the Golden Avenger a pummeling as well. "The hollow suit of armor that Tony remote controls is totally destroyed, and in order to stop Ultimo, he realizes that he's got to get into some armor himself," Yomtov said. "He's not fully healed, but he has to have a go at this guy, because he is now all that stands in the way of the destruction of California."

In addition to donning new component-heavy armor which Yomtov described as "the most radical we've had in quite a while," the convalescing Stark will enlist several friends to strap on past Iron Man garb and fight at his side. The Shellhead squadron will include everyone from Stark's new CEO to longtime buddy Happy Hogan. "With all these suits of armor flying into battle, it's going to be a terrific visual book," Yomtov said.

At the same time, he added, the milestone special will serve an important logistical purpose: condensing 30 years of armor refinements, supporting cast changes,

AVENGERS

Earth's Mightiest Heroes had better get ready to put some added oomph into their traditional "Avengers Assemble!" rallying cry. As the group's thirtieth anniversary celebration continues to gain momentum, developments in Avengers-related solo titles and limited series will further test the fiber and shake up the dynamic of this illustrious super hero cooperative. The bonds between Avengers teammates, always subject to swing wildly from rock solid to just plain rocky, are about to undergo some changes for the ages.

IRON MANIA

The Iron Man legend, also three decades old this year, stands to generate perhaps the farthest reaching shocks to the collective Avengers system. In the months ahead, Editor Nel Yomtov said, the recently disabled Tony Stark will rise from his sick bed, War Machine will escape Iron Man's shadow, and, as a combined result of both this storyline and the X-Men/Avengers crossover, the Avengers West Coast will emerge as a group literally reborn.

Writer Len Kaminski, penciler Kevin Hopgood, and inker Steve Mitchell kick off this chain of events with

and other bits of Iron Man history into one issue. "New readers are going to feel as if they're coming aboard at ground zero."

While Tony Stark may finally be up and about, his estranged partner, James Rhodes, remains furious over the way Stark had earlier manipulated him and faked his own death. Following the anniversary issue, a climactic face-off will erupt between Iron Man and Rhodey as War Machine.

Stark emerges from this turn of events invigorated; when the disgruntled Avengers West Coast membership permanently splits from the charter group in the wake of the X-Men/Avengers crossover, Iron Man takes the initiative in shaping them into a new, more focused, more respected unit. (This transaction will be laid out for Marvel readers in **AVENGERS WEST COAST #102**, coming in November, and **FORCE WORKS #1**, due the following month.) Rhodey, meanwhile, walks away disgusted, setting the stage for the debut of his ongoing WAR MACHINE solo title.

Slated to kick off in January of '94 in a double-size issue with special cover treatment, the new series will be edited by Yomtov and co-written by Len Kaminski and Scott Benson (**IRON MAN ANNUAL '93**), with pencils by

hot newcomer Gabriel Gecko.

Although the book is a spin-off, Yomtov acknowledged, it won't be an **IRON MAN** clone. "We will make **WAR MACHINE** as different from **IRON MAN** as we possibly can, yet still keep the ante up high on action-adventure," Yomtov said. "Rhodey and Tony Stark look at solutions to problems in very different ways," he continued. "Rhodey doesn't have the longtime associations with other super heroes that Tony Stark has, and he doesn't have the resources that Tony has. If his armor is damaged, he's going to have to put something together piecemeal to keep the suit up and running."

What Rhodey does possess is an especially keen awareness of the nigh-sacred quality of human rights, a character trait which will be fleshed out in the buildup to **WAR MACHINE #1**. "Rhodey keeps on saying, 'There's got to be more to this super hero business than beating up on guys in funny spandex costumes. I've got to be able to put this suit of armor and my intelligence to better use,'" Yomtov said.

Driven by this aim, the ominous-looking black-and-white clad hero hooks up with Worldwatch, a peacekeeping organization in the United Nations mold. In the book's opening four-part story arc, War Machine tackles an oppressive African military regime which has kidnapped Worldwatch leader Vincent Do'Qui, a friend of Rhodey's and a human rights activist on a level with Nelson Mandela.

Despite such subject matter, Yomtov stressed that **WAR MACHINE** won't weigh readers down with dry political moralizing. First issue guest stars Cable and Deathlok will no doubt help to establish the desired frenetic tone. "War Machine will be a real big part of the Marvel mainstream," Yomtov said. "It's just that the book isn't geared solely toward your run-of-the-mill super villains."

RUMBLINGS OF THUNDER

For literally a couple of generations, Thor, with his majestic bearing and lofty heroic discourse, embodied the grandeur that was the Avengers. But verily, these are the '90s, and just as the Avengers have evolved into a different group, the Thunderer legend has taken a marked turn toward the vernacular in the form of Eric Masterson. Joining teammates like Captain America as one of the Marvel Universe's elite, Eric recently premiered in his own monthly title, **THUNDERSTRIKE**, forging ahead with a hammer and heroic identity uniquely his own. The original thunderer, meanwhile, isn't just out of the Avengers loop — he's out of his mind.

Thor's woes are the result of the ambitious new storyline which got under way in **THOR #460**, the point at which Eric Masterson exited for **THUNDERSTRIKE** with creators Tom DeFalco, Ron Frenz, and Al Milgrom in tow. Applying their considerable psychological expertise, writer Ron Marz, penciler Bruce Zick, and inker Mike DeCarlo concluded that Thor's lengthy imprisonment within Eric's subconscious surely must have left him unhinged.

The Thunder God looks to continue on this track through the rest of the year, with his growing insanity reaching the critical point in a crossover encompassing multiple issues of **THOR, THE WARLOCK CHRONICLES, WARLOCK AND THE INFINITY WATCH**, and **THE SILVER SURFER**. This development will involve Thor's Avengers allies inasmuch as his nihilism poses a threat to the entire Marvel Universe.

> "The original thunderer. . .isn't just out of the Avengers loop — he's out of his mind."

Back on Midgard, Thunderstrike will be busy learning that the Juggernaut's destructive impulses are a bit more modest: he merely wants to pulverize one Eric Masterson. Following this second-issue blowout, scripter DeFalco, penciler Frenz, and inker Milgrom will shift the emphasis from heavyweight to heavy drama with a story focusing on the morality of vigilantism.

In this latter, hard-edged tale, Eric's son, Kevin, witnesses a schoolteacher's murder at the hands of a copycat Punisher. "Nobody knows why it happened," Frenz said, "but the suggestions start to lead toward the idea that there was a child pornography ring operating out of the school." Eric is so concerned about his son's well-being that when Sif turns up mid-story seeking his help in reasoning with Thor, he declines without a second thought.

Spider-Man swings into Thunderstrike's neighborhood in issue #4, an action fest which also weaves together the diverse paths of Code: Blue, **SHIELD**, and the sub-Manhattan Deviants of past *THOR* installments. With the emergence among the Deviants of a major new villain known as Komodon, Frenz said, "it's going to become apparent there's a war going on under New York City." Code: Blue heads below ground to investigate, only to be detained Big Brother-style for interfering in **SHIELD**'s jurisdiction.

"We're planning to do a nice big action story where Eric actually breaks Code: Blue out of the Helicarrier," Frenz promised.

Throughout these episodes, **THUNDERSTRIKE**'s creative team will continue to tease readers with mysterious hints about the identity of Bloodaxe. One supporting player will have to die to be cleared of suspicion. "We've tried to leave the door open for Bloodaxe being just about anybody," Frenz said. In fact, as long as Eric remains in possession of the blade, wrested away from his archenemy in the opening issue, not even he is completely immune to the weapon's dark temptations. Thor may not be the only unbalanced Marvel thunderer around.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Even when Captain America hasn't officially held the title of Avengers chairman, his status as the group's elder statesman has inevitably tagged him a source of clutch leadership.

Meanwhile, although her experience rivals Cap's, the Scarlet Witch has rarely been accorded such recognition, and she finds herself hampered by self-doubt following her appointment as chairwoman in **AVENGERS WEST COAST #99**. Meet the new boss, hardly the same as the old boss—but destined to grow a whole lot closer in stature as upcoming issues of both **CAPTAIN AMERICA** and a new **SCARLET WITCH** limited series unfold.

Beginning with **CAPTAIN AMERICA #422**, writer Mark Gruenwald, penciler Rik Levins, and inker Danny Bulanadi are having their hero retreat somewhat from his traditional role as Avengers point man. Between runins with a new artillery-toting villain dubbed Ballistic, Cap moves out of Avengers Mansion and back to Brooklyn Heights, setting up shop in the building where his Stars and Stripes Hotline is based. In the wake of recent conflicts with his teammates, "Cap feels like too much of a den mother, like his being in the mansion has a stifling effect on the rest of the Avengers," Gruenwald explained.

Cap's eagerly sought breath of fresh air turns lung-choking, however, as change in his routine gives way to violent upheaval in issue #425. "Captain America gets a piece of news that is very possibly going to change his life forever," Gruenwald cryptically hinted. Not only his role as a leader, but his very career as a hero, hangs in the balance.

"It's a terrific story of demons and fire and brimstone."

The stakes are similarly high in the four-issue **SCARLET WITCH** tale, a series which starts in November and marks the Vision-less Wanda's first truly solo comics run. A supernatural thriller scripted by **FORCE WORKS** writers Andy Lanning and Dan Abnett, pencilled by sci-fi artist John Higgins (**MUTATIS**), and inked by Mark McKenna, the book pits its new-look heroine against Lore, a demonic entity who's swallowing the psychic energies of the solar system whole. Lurking in the shadows is an updated Master Pandemonium.

"It's a terrific story of demons and fire and brimstone," Editor Nel Yomtov said. "It's the Scarlet Witch at her orneriest, really—she's pushed out the wall, and she's got to battle this Lore creature in the grittiest way possible."

The underlying function of this trial, Yomtov added, is "to get her character away from being the victim. We want her to be the victor." In achieving this, the Scarlet Witch gains a clearer, more confident perspective on her station as head of the West Coast Avengers and, ultimately, Force Works. "Having gone through this series, she will come out saying, 'There's no question about it—I am the leader of this group. I have earned that distinction,'" he noted.

SOLO FLIGHTS

In addition to **THE SCARLET WITCH** storyline, current **AVENGERS WEST COAST** action is spawning two Yomtov-helmed limited series featuring Spider-Woman and Hawkeye. Both will embark on truth-seeking quests, but only one will return to the Avengers fold.

In the four-part **SPIDER-WOMAN**, due in September, **AVENGERS WEST COAST** writer Roy Thomas takes his recent Deathweb story arc a step further, aided by the moody pencils of artist John Czop. The female web-spinner's second encounter with this nightmarish band of spider-like mutants reveals a startling link between her origin and theirs, one which involves Julia Carpenter's parents, as well. U.S.Agent joins in helping to unravel the mystery.

"We discover that the things that empowered her to be Spider-Woman are a lot more sinister than we've been led to believe," Yomtov said. These hidden factors are also a lot more potent than anyone realized, giving rise to the likelihood that her powers can be *augmented* — and her value to her team increased.

"...the things that empowered her to be Spider-Woman are a lot more sinister than we've been led to believe."

While Spider-Woman's journey toward self-discovery takes her as far as the jungles of South America, Hawkeye retreats to the Canadian Rockies in his four-issue interlude, debuting in November following the joltingly tragic conclusion of **AVENGERS WEST COAST #100**.

Although Hawkeye heads off to the wilderness seeking some time for quiet introspection, writer Chuck Dixon (**THE PUNISHER**, Epic's **LAWDOG**), hot new penciler Scott Kolins (**LETHAL FOES OF SPIDER-MAN**), and inker Tim Dzon (**AVENGERS WEST COAST**) plan to have the archer "rough it" in a less idyllic sense, as he stumbles across a shadowy genetics operation and is compelled to investigate.

"He really hadn't been planning on any serious action —he just brought along his quiver and a normal array of arrows," Yomtov explained. But as the situation escalates, Hawkeye fashions himself a new costume and dives in, answering gnawing questions about his own place among the ranks of the super heroic along the way. War Machine turns up to lend a welcome assist, but clearly, Yomtov said, this is Hawk's mission, one which will establish him as a loner for the foreseeable future.

"This is as intense a storyline as Hawkeye has ever seen."

TO AVENGE AGAIN?

Once an Avenger, always an Avenger, presumably, even though Quasar and Wonder Man, like Hawkeye, Thor, and others, will be kept in something of a reserve role as the team's anniversary draws to a conclusion. **QUASAR**, in fact, will figure more immediately into **FANTASTIC FOUR** continuity; following Wendell Vaughn's return to Project Pegasus and a later encounter with Warlock, writer Mark Gruenwald and artist John Heebink (**SHIELD**) are ushering their hero into **STARBLASTERS**, a four-issue limited series involving multiple crossovers with **QUASAR**, **THE FANTASTIC FOUR**, and **THE SECRET DEFENDERS**. Gruenwald described the cosmic-scale epic as focusing on "a group of alien pirate-tyrants who will stop at nothing to get the power of the Starbrand." Let the Marvel Universe (and the New Universe, for that matter) beware.

Following Simon Williams' recent transformation into a being of pure energy, **WONDER MAN** stands to be played out in a vast arena in the next few months as well. Editor Nel Yomtov, who joined the creative team of writer Gerard Jones, penciler Tim Hamilton, and inker Brad Joyce with issue #26, said that the revamped Wonder Man won't be as self-absorbed as he's been in the past, and that the book's prominent Hollywood setting will be eased into the background.

"Wonder Man's dedication will rise to a very grand scale, even to the point where he'll be a loose cannon at times," Yomtov said. This new outlook will leave his team status indeterminate, but a planned confrontation with the Hulk and a future storyline set in Asgard will continue to keep a big focus on him.

CHARTING THE PAST — AND THE FUTURE

A pair of bookends to the continuing legend of Earth's Mightiest Heroes will be made available to readers later this year in the form of **THE AVENGERS FILES** and **THE AVENGERS LOGS**, both edited by Richard Ashford.

Crafted in a vein similar to *THE X-MEN STRIKEFILE*, **THE AVENGERS FILES** will feature a mix of comic art and computer-enhanced images reviewing past adventures. A Kree record of Avengers history discovered amid the debris of "Operation: Galactic Storm" furnishes the book's unique framework. Current **AVENGERS** writer Bob Harras is teaming up with artist Jeff Moore (**AVENGERS**, *Valor*) on the 16-page Kree narrative, while a host of other talents contribute bonus pin-ups.

THE AVENGERS LOGS looks to be an invaluable, studied reference companion to past and future developments, with encyclopedic entries on the team's sizable membership and a guide to Avengers Mansion. "The idea behind **THE AVENGERS LOGS** is to give readers a sort of crib sheet for studying this group," Ashford said. "Thirty years of history is a lot to get your hands around."

And it may very well be that the most exciting, adrenaline-charged Avengers chapters are yet to be written.

Having entered the world of comics through pieces written for the Boston Globe, writer/researcher Tom Russo continues to split his time between MARVEL AGE assignments and "real world" journalism for Premiere magazine

Sidebar:

Iron Man
Writer: Len Kaminsky
Penciler: Kev Hopgood
Inker: Steve Mitchell
Editor: Nel Yomtov
Frequency: monthly
Pages: 32
Price: $1.25

War Machine
Writer: Len Kaminsky
Penciler: Gabriel Gecko
Inker: TBD
Editor: Nel Yomtov
Frequency: monthly
Pages: 32
Price: $1.25

Thor
Writer: Ron Marz
Penciler: Bruce Zick
Inker: Mike DeCarlo
Editor: Mike Rockwitz
Frequency: monthly
Pages: 32
Price: $1.25

Thunderstrike
Writer: Tom DeFalco
Penciler: Ron Frenz
Inker: Al Milgrom
Editor: Ralph Macchio
Frequency: monthly
Pages: 32
Price: $1.25

Captain America
Writer: Mark Gruenwald
Penciler: Rik Levins
Inker: Danny Bulanadi
Editor: Mike Rockwitz
Frequency: monthly
Pages: 32
Price: $1.25

Hawkeye
Writer: Chuck Dixon
Penciler: Scott Kolins
Inker: Tim Dzon
Editor: Nel Yomtov
Frequency: monthly
Pages: 32
Price: $1.75

Quasar
Writer: Mark Gruenwald
Penciler: John Heebink
Inker: Ralph Cabrera
Editor: Mike Rockwitz
Frequency: monthly
Pages: 32
Price: $1.25

Starblasters
Writer: Mark Gruenwald
Penciler: Andy Smith
Inker: TBD
Editor: Nel Yomtov
Frequency: four issues monthly
Pages: 48
Price: $2.50

Wonder Man
Writer: Gerard Jones
Penciler: Tim Hamilton
Inker: Brad Joyce
Editor: Nel Yomtov
Frequency: monthly
Pages: 32
Price: $1.25

Spider-Woman
Writer: Roy Thomas
Penciler: John Czop
Inker: Fred Fredericks
Editor: Nel Yomtov
Frequency: four issues monthly
Pages: 32
Price: $1.75

Scarlet Witch
Writer: Andy Lanning and Dan Abnett
Penciler: John Higgins
Inker: Mark McKenna
Editor: Nel Yomtov
Frequency: four issues monthly
Pages: 32
Price: $1.75

WHERE

ANACHRONAUTS — Warriors from different time periods, now serve Ravonna the Terminatrix in Chronopolis

ANT-MAN II — Active as a crimefighter in Los Angeles

ARKON — Rules otherdimensional world of Polemachus

BARON ZEMO I — Deceased

BARON ZEMO II — Recently captured by Spider-Man and jailed

BEAST — Active in X-Men's Blue Team, Avengers reservist

BEYONDER — Transformed into a large Cosmic Cube, part of which later became the female cosmic humanoid Kosmos, who now travels through the universe as Kubik's companion.

BLACK KNIGHT I — Deceased

BLACK KNIGHT II — Deceased

BLACK KNIGHT III — Active in East Coast Avengers

BLACK PANTHER — Ruler, African kingdom of Wakanda, engaged to marry American singer Monica Lynne, Avengers reservist

BLACK WIDOW — Active in East Coast Avengers

BOGATYRI (Doctor Vladimir Volkh, Mikula Golubev, Svyagator, Morning Star) — A hard-liner Soviet counterpart to the Fantastic Four, the Bogatyri reached accommodation with the Russian government after the collapse of the Soviet Union. One member, the anti-American Morning Star (Zvezda Dennista), quit the team in protest, recently aided the Avengers west Coast against Doctor Demonicus, and has become attracted to the US Agent.

CAPTAIN AMERICA — Active in East Coast Avengers

CAPTAIN ATLAS — Has settled on an unnamed planet with Dr. Minerva to parent a new superhumanoid race of Kree

CAPTAIN MARVEL I — Deceased

CAPTAIN MARVEL II — East Coast Avengers reservist, active in New Orleans

CARTER, PEGGY — Member of East Coast Avengers support crew, communications

CHTHON — Imprisoned beneath Wundagore Mountain, exerts evil influence on Earth through the Book of the Darkhold (developments forthcoming in "Midnight Sons" titles)

COLLECTOR — At large in outer space

COTATI — Sentient, psionic plant race, current activities unknown.

COUNT NEFARIA — Deceased; powers and costume adopted by the criminal Nefarius.

CRYSTAL — Active in East Coast Avengers

DEATHBIRD — Governs the Kree as viceroy on behalf of her sister, Shi'ar majestrix Lilandra

DEATHWEB (Antro, Arachne, Therak) — A team of mercenaries with spider-like powers, captured by the Avengers West Coast imprisoned

DOCTOR DEMONICUS — Seemingly drowned during the sinking of his island kingdom Demonica

DOCTOR MINERVA — Has settled on an unnamed planet with Capt. Atlas to parent a new superhumanoid race of Kree

DOCTOR PYM (aka Ant-Man I, Giant-Man I, Goliath I, Yellowjacket I) — Avengers West Coast reservist, continuing scientific research in Los Angeles

ENCHANTRESS — Presumably now living in Asgard, current activities unknown

FALCON — Avengers East Coast reservist, active New York City's Harlem, recently accompanied Captain America on vari-

FIREBIRD (aka Espirita) — Former Avenger and Ranger, current activities and whereabouts unknown

GHAUR — Deviant high priest who masterminded the recreation of the Serpent Crown; vanished during a confrontation with the spirit of Naga, the Avengers, and the Fantastic Four; current whereabouts unknown.

GILGAMESH — Eternal and Avengers reservist

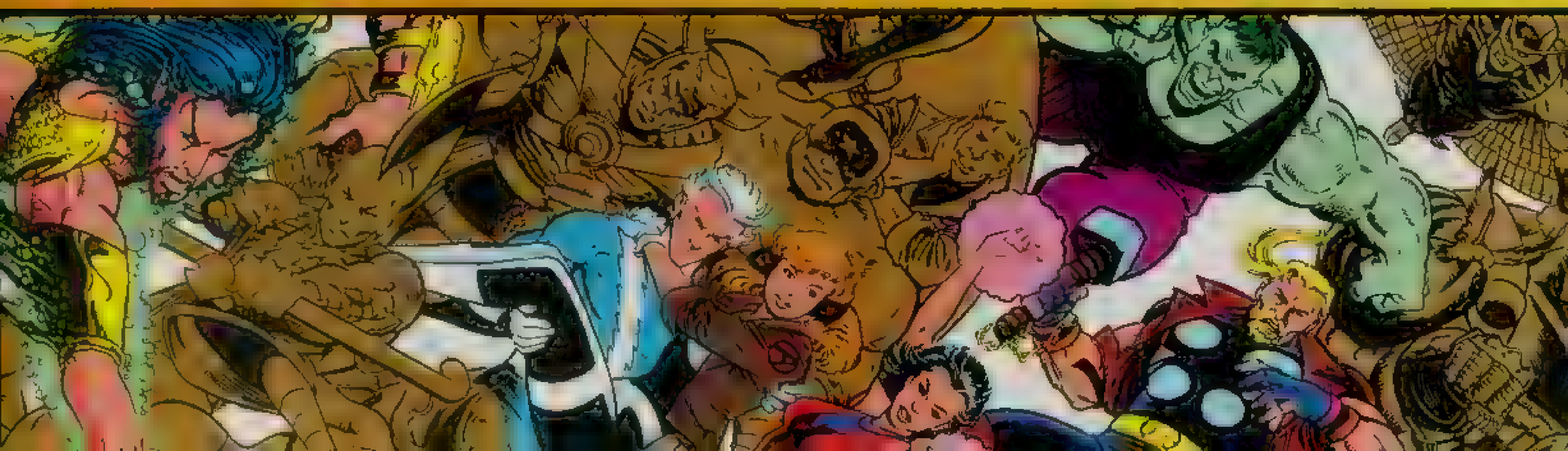
GOLIATH III (POWER MAN I) — Imprisoned in the Vault

GRANDMASTER — Current activities unknown

GRAVITON — Imprisoned in the Vault

AR

GREAT LAKES AVENGERS (Big Bertha, Dinah Soar, Doorman, Flatman, and Mister Immortal) — Still active as a crimefighting team in the Midwest with the "official" Avengers' approval



THEY

GRIM REAPER — Transformed into a zombie-like being, allied with the demonic entity Blackheart, has recently clashed with brother Wonder Man in Mephisto's realm.

HAWKEYE — Active in Avengers West Coast, reconciled with wife Mockingbird

HELLCAT — Recently went mad and is cared for by her husband Daimon Hellstorm and their friend the Gargoyle.

HERA — Currently undertaking a scheme of vengeance against Hercules

HERCULES — Active with the East Coast Avengers.

HIGH EVOLUTIONARY — Geneticist with evolutionarily-advanced powers, recently went insane and is cared for by his New Men and the New Immortals somewhere in outer space

HULK — Currently leads the Pantheon during its founder Agamemnon's absence.

HUMAN TORCH I — Having lost his flame powers, the original Human Torch pursues a normal life in the company of his close friend, Ann Raymond, Avengers reservist

IMMORTUS — Unknown to Avengers, currently observes the Terminatrix ongoing activities

INVISIBLE WOMAN — Currently active in the Fantastic Four

IRON MAN — Slowly recovering from a brush with death, the bedridden Tony Stark now operates an Iron Man battlesuit by cybernetic remote control. Returned to the Avengers during the Infinity Crusade.

JAMESON, JOHN — Recently began a new career as a costumed crimefighter

JARVIS, EDWIN — Butler and head of staff for the East Coast Avengers headquarters

JOCASTA — Destroyed by an anti-matter explosion at the end of the "Evolutionary War"

JONES, RICK — Living in Reno, Nevada

KANG — Fatally wounded in protecting the Terminatrix, who placed him in suspended animation at his Chronopolis base

KORVAC (*aka* **MICHAEL**) — Projected his consciousness into various descendants until it returned to his own infant form in the Guardians of the Galaxy's alternate future

KREE — Billions of the alien Kree were killed by the radiation of a "nega-bomb" at the climax of the Kree-Shi'ar War; the rest underwent mutation and are now ruled by the Shi'ar.

KUBIK — A Cosmic Cube who achieved sentience and humanoid form, now travels the universe with Kosmos.

LAVA MEN — A small number were transformed into golden shape-changing humanoids, the remaining members of the race currently ruled by the mad Subterranean Grotesk

LIVING LASER — Energy being whose form was recently disrupted by War Machine

LIVING LIGHTNING — A West Coast reservist pursuing his college education.

LLYRA — Vanished during a confrontation with the spirit of Naga over possession of the new Serpent Crown

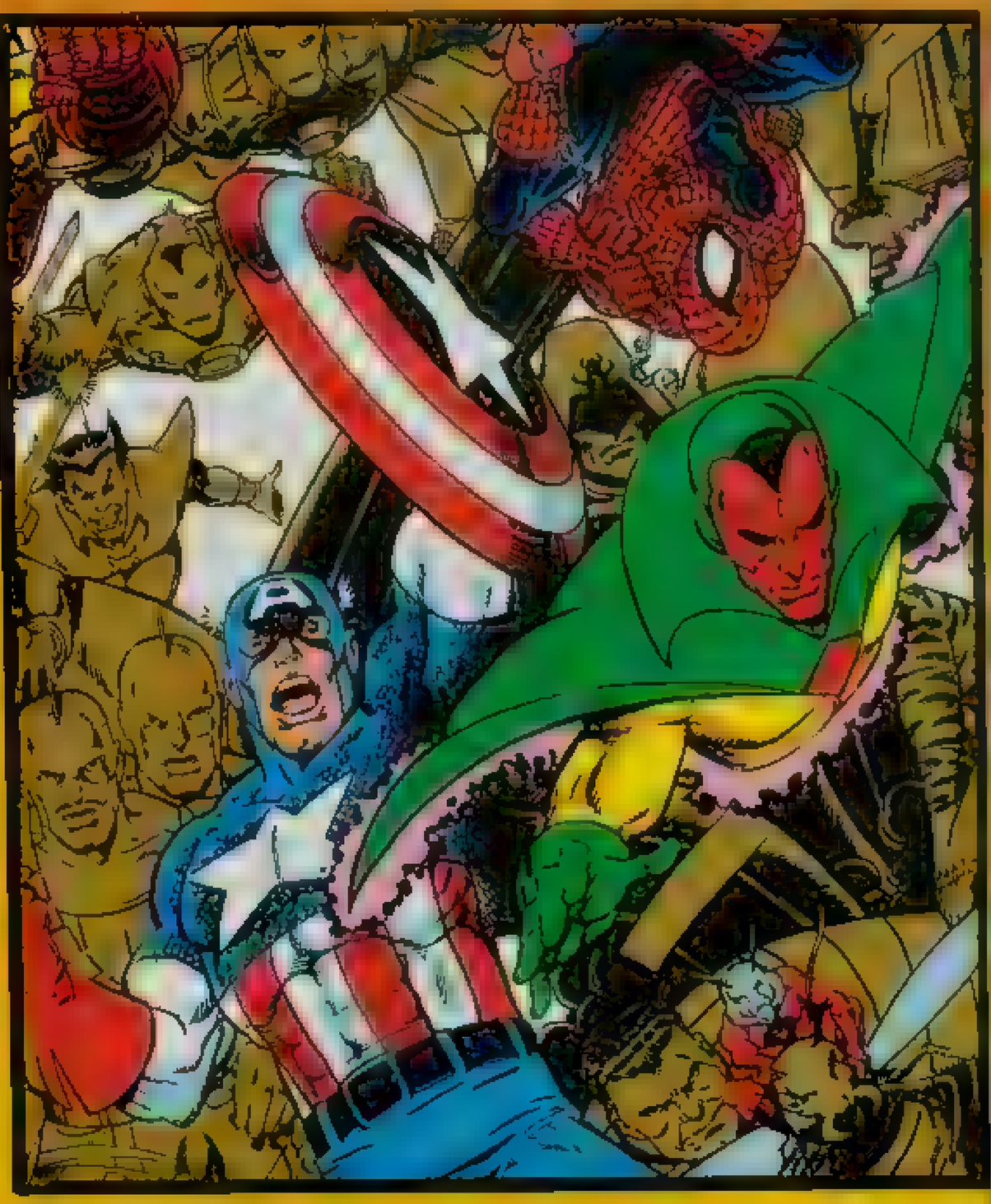
LOKI — After taking possession of Odin's body, Loki's Asgardian spirit was captured by Mephisto and imprisoned within a mystical soul shroud.

LUNA — Lives at the Avengers' New York City headquarters with mother Crystal.

MACHINE MAN — Serves as a reserve member of the Avengers West Coast.

MAELSTROM — After usurping the identity and powers of the abstract being Anomaly, Maelstrom attempted to destroy the universe with an enormous black hole, but was apparently destroyed himself in combat with Quasar.

MAGNETO — Recently reappeared after his apparent death during an encounter with the X-Men



MANDARIN — After his last clash with Iron Man, the Mandarin lost his rings and hands and fell into a deep coma, and is cared for by the peasant Li Sung somewhere in China.

MANTIS — After projecting her consciousness into a body of plant matter and giving birth to the "Celestial Messiah," Mantis became the companion of the Silver Surfer in space. Last seen asking Moondragon for help in freeing her son from the Cotati.

NOW?

MARRINA (*aka* **LEVIATHAN**) — Seemingly killed by Namor, the Sub-Mariner

MASTER PANDEMONIUM — Swallowed up by a mystical gap in his own body during his last encounter with the Avengers

MASTERS OF EVIL (membership varies, current roster: Doctor Octopus, Absorbing Man, Gargantua, Jackhammer, Oddball, Powder Keg, Puff Adder, Shocker, Titania) — The most recent version of this criminal team invaded the Avengers' East Coast headquarters during the "Infinity War" but were defeated by the Guardians of the Galaxy

MISTER FANTASTIC — Currently active in the Fantastic Four.

MOCKINGBIRD Active with the Avengers West Coast, married to Hawkeye

MOONDRAGON — A member of Adam Warlock's Infinity Watch

MOON KNIGHT Active as a crimefighter in New York City

MOONSTONE II - Imprisoned in the Vault.

MS. MARVEL I (BINARY) Starjammer, lost her memory and original superhuman powers to X-Men member Rogue, gained new superhuman abilities and joined the Starjammers as Binary

NEBULA Converted into a cyborg, Nebula resumed her career as a space pirate

NGH THE UNSPEAKABLE — Merged with the female humanoid Ahh to become an unnamed being of great power, left for outer space to aid alien civilizations.

NIGHT SHIFT (Hangman II, Brothers Grimm, Dansen Macabre, Digger, Gypsy Moth, Misfit, Needle, Tatterdemalion, Ticktock) — No longer led by the Shroud, who manipulated them into fighting crime, the Night Shift still operates as a team of criminals in the Los Angeles area

NUKLO — No longer emitting toxic levels of radiation, Nuklo now leads a quiet life as a service station attendant in Woodstock, New York.

O'BRIEN, MICHAEL — Member of the Avengers East Coast support crew

PACIFIC OVERLORDS (Dr Demonicus, Cybertooth, Irezumi, Jawbreaker, Kain, Kuroko) — Disbanded with the apparent demise of Doctor Demonicus

PALADIN — Active worldwide as a mercenary

PEOPLE'S PROTECTORATE (Crimson Dynamo V, Fantasma, Perun, Red Guardian IV, Vostok) — Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the super team now serves the Russian government.

PHANTOM RIDER I The spirit of this crimefighter of the Old West takes possession of the modern day day Phantom Rider IV

PHANTOM RIDER IV — The present day successor to his legendary ancestor, the new Phantom Rider operates as a member of the Southwestern crimefighting team, the Rangers

QUICKSILVER — Currently a member of X-Factor seeking reconciliation with his estranged wife, Crystal

RAGE — Currently a member of the New Warriors

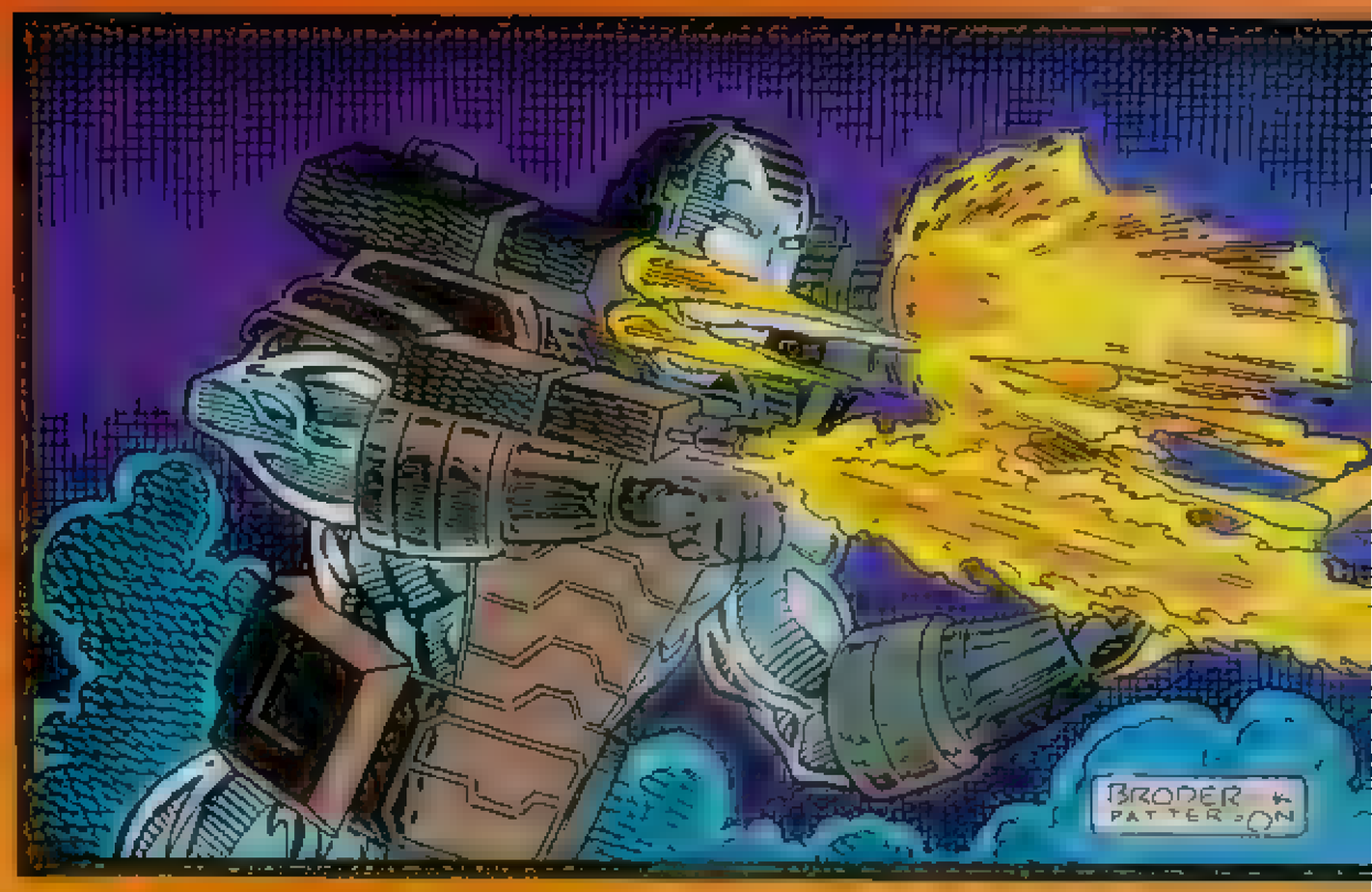
RAMA-TUT — Has not been seen in the 20th Century since he helped the Avengers combat his evil other self, Kang the Conqueror

RED GUARDIAN II - Husband to the Black Widow, died saving her life in China

RED WOLF — Active in the Western United States as a crimefighter and Native American champion, recently encountered Nomad

RONAN THE ACCUSER — Battled the Avengers during the Kree-Shi'ar War, current whereabouts and activities unknown

SANDMAN — Currently a member of Silver Sable's Wild Pack



SCARLET CENTURION — Became Kang the Conqueror, a divergent version of the Scarlet Centurion now rules an interplanetary empire in the future of the Squadron Supreme's time line

SCARLET WITCH On leave from the Avengers West Coast.

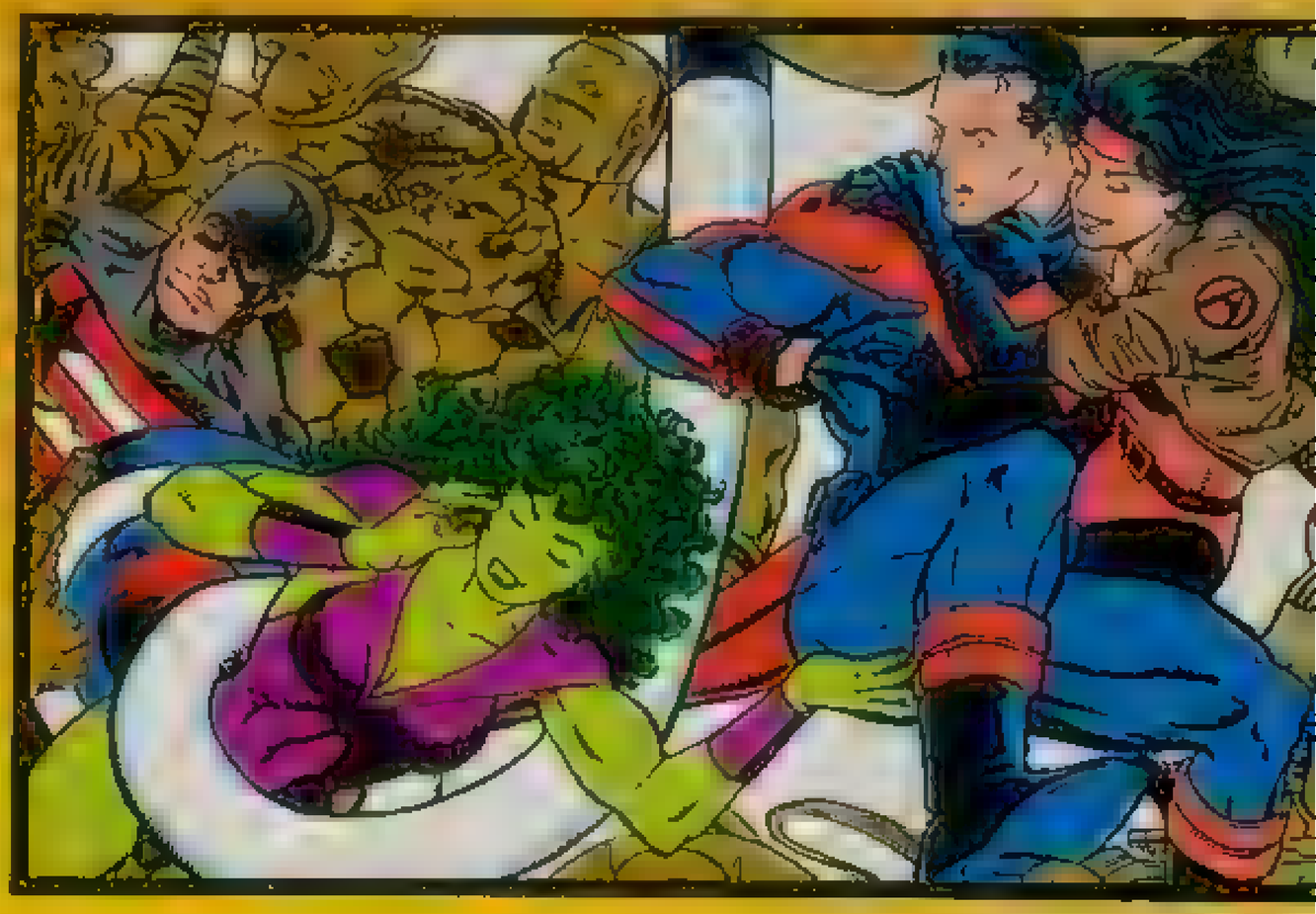
SCORPIO I — Jake Fury, brother to Nick Fury, whose human consciousness inhabits an android form, was deactivated along with the rest of his android Zodiac II in the dimension of the Brotherhood of the Ankh

SERSI — Active with the East Coast Avengers

SET — This ancient demon's body was destroyed by Thor, who hurled Set's heads into various other dimensions.

SHE-HULK — East Coast Avengers reservist, active in New York City as a crimefighter and lawyer

SHI'AR — Having triumphed in the Kree-Shi'ar War, Princess Lilandra and the Shi'ar now also rule the remains of the Kree Empire



SHROUD — Although he poses as a criminal, the Shroud secretly fights crime in Los Angeles. Recently severed his ties with the Night Shift.

SKRULLS — Alien race recently regained their shape-changing powers thanks to Empress S'byll, who has reorganized the Skrull Empire under her leadership The Skrulls secretly manipulated the Kree and Shi'ar into war against each other

SONS OF THE SERPENT — The most recent version of this racist organization unsuccessfully clashed with the Avengers and New Warriors in New York City.

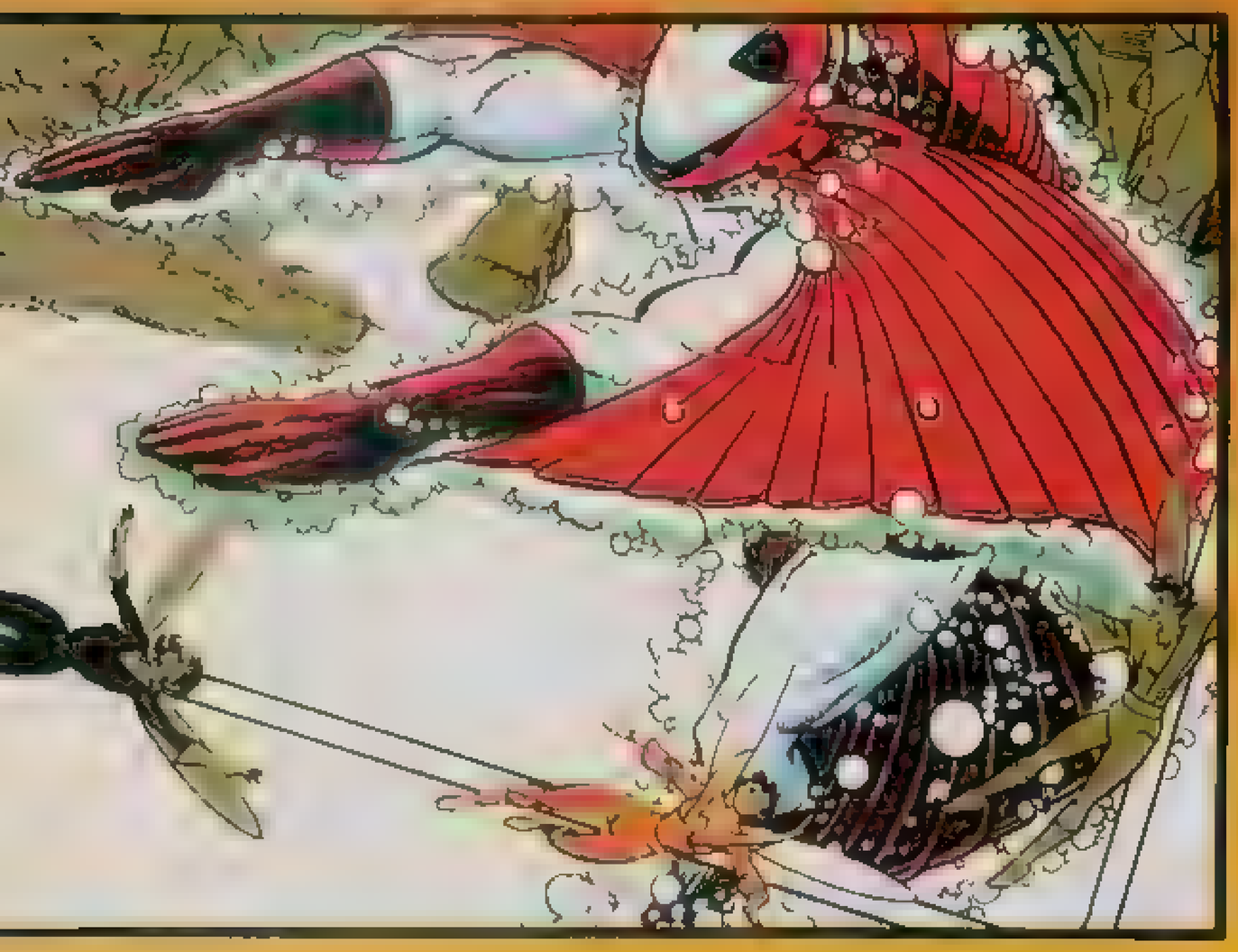
SPACE PHANTOM — Still residing in Immortus's limbo

SPIDER-MAN — Active as a costumed crimefighter in New York; although an East Coast reservist, Spider-Man has not participated in recent Avengers activities.

SPIDER-WOMAN II — An active member of the Avengers West Coast

SQUADRON SINISTER (Hyperion II, Nighthawk II, Doctor Spectrum II, Speed Demon) — The sole remaining active member of this criminal team is the Speed Demon, who recently served in the Sinister Syndicate. Hyperion II and Nighthawk II were killed and Doctor Spectrum II's Power Prism was rendered useless

SQUADRON SUPREME — The surviving members are based at Project: Pegasus on the Avengers' Earth and are seeking a means of returning to their own alternate Earth.



STANKOWICZ, FABIAN — Member of the Avengers East Coast technical support crew

STARFORCE (Deathbird, Korath the Pursuer, Shatterax, Ultimus, Captain Atlas, Doctor Minerva) — Current members of the Kree Starforce serve the Shi'ar under the direction of Deathbird.

STARFOX — Avengers reservist most recently active during the Kree-Shi'ar War, currently residing on Titan

STARJAMMERS (Corsair, Ch'od, Raza, Hepzibah, Binary) — Currently serving Shi'ar Princess-Majestrix Lilandra

STINGRAY — An honorary reserve member of the Avengers, otherwise continuing his oceanographic research

SUB-MARINER — Recently returned to Atlantis

SUPER-ADAPTOID — Most recently fought Spider-Man as a member of the new Enforcers

SUPREME INTELLIGENCE — Although the Supreme Intelligence's physical form was destroyed by many of the Avengers at the end of the Kree-Shi'ar War, his consciousness survived

SWORDSMAN — Deceased; the original Swordsman's body was returned to its grave by the Cotati.

TASKMASTER — Most recently defeated by Daredevil.

TERMINATRIX (*aka* **RAVONNA**) — Rules Chronopolis and Kang's vast empire, in his stead

TERMINUS — Imploded in outer space following his last battle with the Avengers. A Terminus battlesuit was recently discovered and employed by AIM in the Savage Land but was destroyed by Antarctic Vibranium.

TETRARCHS OF ENTROPY — Dispatched by Quasar, Thor, and Sersi to the "dimension of exile"

THANE ECTOR — Leader of the alien Brethren, now deceased.

THANOS — After losing the Infinity Gauntlet, Thanos retired to the quiet life of a farmer on an unnamed planet, but recently aided the Avengers and other Earth heroes against the Magus during the Infinity War.

THING — Currently active in the Fantastic Four.

THOR I — Freed from imprisonment within Thor II's subconscious mind, Thor I has devoted himself to his duties as a prince of Asgard. Recently has traveled through outer space in the company of a mysterious Valkyrie and seems to be falling victim to warrior madness.

THUNDERSTRIKE (*aka* **THOR II**) — After acquiring the enchanted mace, Thunderstrike, Eric Masterson rejoined the East Coast Avengers.

TIGRA — On leave of absence from the Avengers West Coast, living with aborigines in Australia

TWO-GUN KID — Crimefighter from the 1870s, participated in Avengers missions when he traveled through time to the present. Currently back in the 19th century.

UATU THE WATCHER — Still observes Earth from the Blue Area of the Moon.

U-FOES — Most recently worked for the Leader but were defeated by the Hulk.

ULTRON — Launched into outer space on a missile with his "mate" War Toy

USAGENT — Active in Avengers West Coast

VISION — Currently active with the East Coast Avengers

WAR MACHINE (*aka* **IRON MAN II**) — James Rhosed, resigned from Stark Enterprises and joined the Avengers West Coast.

WAR TOY — Launched into outer space on a missile with her "mate" Ultron during their battle with the Avengers

WASP — On leave from the Avengers, remains a reservist with the Avengers West Coast. Continues to pursue her careers as a fashion designer and screenwriter.

WHIRLWIND — Last seen among costumed criminals at AIM convention

WHIZZER I — Deceased.

WONDER MAN — Resigned from the Avengers West Coast but continues his careers as a costumed crimefighter and film star in Los Angeles

YELLOW CLAW — In seclusion following his recent clash with Nick Fury and SHIELD

YELLOWJACKET II — Joined the Guardians of the Galaxy and traveled with them into their 30th century alternate future time line

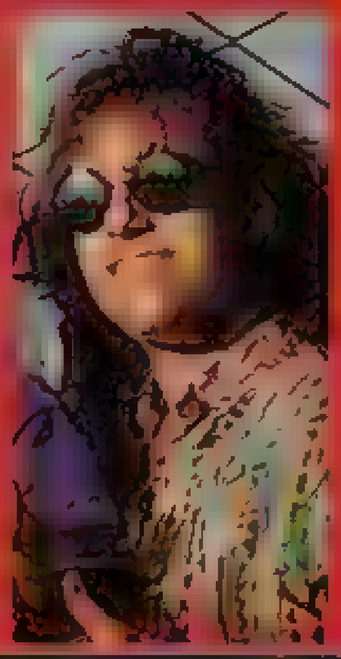
ZEUS — Monarch of Olympus, father of Hercules

ZODIAC I — All members except Scorpio I now deceased, in most cases killed by Scorpio's android Zodiac II.

ZODIAC II — All android members were deactivated in the dimension of the Brotherhood of the Ankh

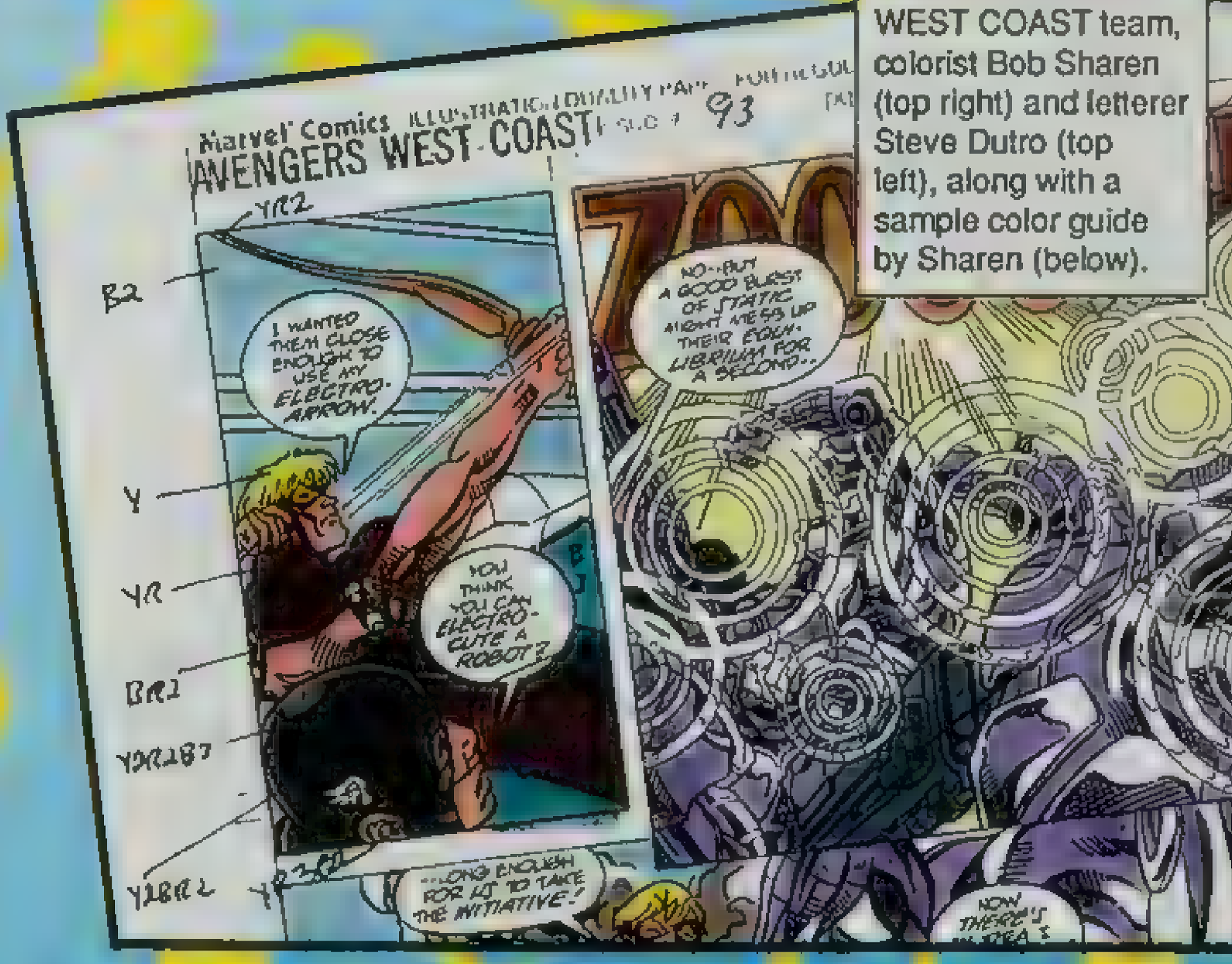
If there's an archivist of the comic book universe, his name is Peter Sanderson. He has been a regular contributor to MARVEL AGE, THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE (all editions), MARVEL SAGA, WOLVERINE SAGA and Who's Who in the DC Universe. His credits include "The Kang Chronicles" (in the 1992 Avengers Annuals) and "The Saga of the Serpent Crown" (in the 1989 Marvel Annuals.)

Colorists and Letterers



PRO FILES

— Terry Hernon


Marvel Comics
AVENGERS WEST COAST
93
I WANTED THEM CLOSE ENOUGH TO USE MY ELECTRO-ARROW!
YOU THINK YOU CAN ELECTRO-CUTE A ROBOT?
...LONG ENOUGH FOR US TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE!
NO--BUT A GOOD BURST OF STATIC MIGHT MESS UP THEIR EQUILIBRIUM FOR A SECOND...
NOW THERE'S AN IDEA!

The unsung heroes of the AVENGERS WEST COAST team, colorist Bob Sharen (top right) and letterer Steve Dutro (top left), along with a sample color guide by Sharen (below).

Comic readers around the world are familiar with the names of the industry's foremost writers and artists. Even the most casual fans know who Stan Lee, John Romita Sr., Peter David, and Andy Kubert are. Fewer, though, are familiar with the colorists and letterers, the other craftsmen who make vital contributions to the production of comic books.

The writer determines the concept for a book, the penciler creates artwork based on the writer's guidelines, and the inker defines the artwork, but the colorist and the letterer greatly influence the final product, as well. **THE AVENGERS** is currently colored by veteran Tom Palmer and lettered by Bill Oakley, while the **AVENGERS WEST COAST** roster includes colorist Bob Sharen and letterer Steve Dutro.

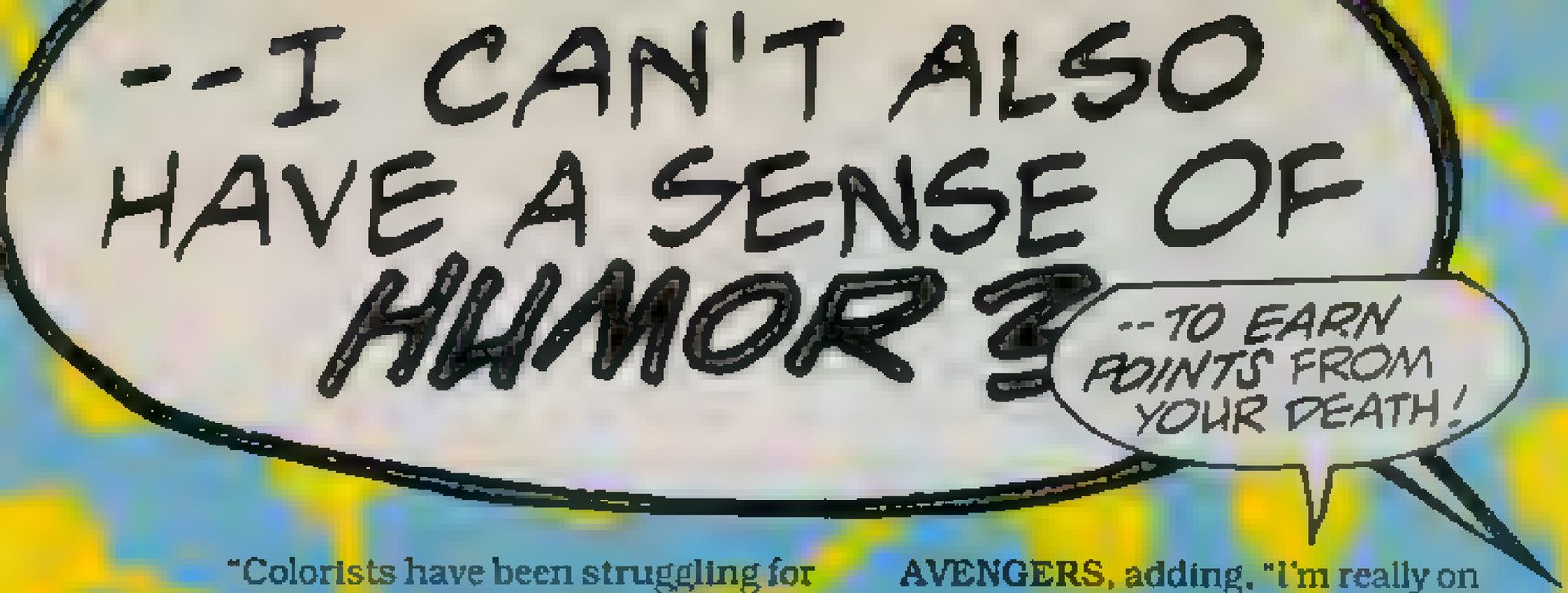
With all the glamor associated with being a writer or a penciler, one wonders if there are any rewards in being a letterer or a colorist. According to Bob Sharen, Tom Palmer, and Steve Dutro, there certainly are.

After Bob Sharen graduated from Newark State College, he worked as an art teacher, which he said, "was a horrible job, and I hated it." Later, he took a job working with retarded children, which he found rewarding in every way except monetarily. In 1970, the idea of living a hippie lifestyle lured Sharen to Carmel, California, which resulted in a job working with the area's most famous resident and former mayor. "I got into acting," he said. "I was in a Clint Eastwood movie, *The Iger Sanction*. We played kids in a classroom, and we were chosen, I think, because we knew not to pick our noses and look at the camera." Sharen also appeared in *Master Gun Fighter*, a movie that starred Tom Loughlin of **Billy Jack** fame, which he said "was a lot of fun, but it was a lame movie."

In 1976, Sharen returned to the East Coast and met up with Dave Hunt, a former classmate, who was looking for an inker. "I learned to ink," he said, but "I hated inking. It didn't suit my temperament at all. Then I tried coloring, and I said, 'Wow, this is really fun!'" Sharen's first coloring job was for Godzilla #13, which was published during Jim Shooter's tenure as editor-in-chief at Marvel. It was Shooter's practice to personally approve new colorists, and the fledgling Sharen brought his work into the editor-in-chief's office. "Obviously, you've been coloring a long time," Shooter remarked after seeing the pages. When Sharen told him, "No, not really," Shooter replied, "Well, how would you like a job?" The colorist subsequently worked on **SPIDER-MAN, CAPTAIN AMERICA, INCREDIBLE HULK, DR. STRANGE**, and others before embarking on his current stint on the **AVENGERS WEST COAST.**

The value of a good colorist is integral to the success of a comic book, and Sharen has great respect for his craft. "Good coloring helps good art and storytelling, but bad coloring can really hurt a story. The basic thrust of being a colorist is that you're working on someone else's work. You have to stick with the mood of the story, do it up right, and don't get in the way. When you get great art, it's a great inspiration."

But, while coloring is enjoying and rewarding, it is not without its challenges. The colorist gets his work close to press time, after the artist and the inker. "We're the guys at the end of the line," Sharen said, "so we get the time pressure. I have a rule. If I get a job that's so tight, I'd rather pass on it. . . I take pride in my work. Lately, there's a proliferation of colorists who haven't had formal training and the art suffers.



"Colorists have been struggling for years to get equal treatment," Sharen commented. "While writers and artists earn royalties on their work, we only get a page rate, but we have to plug in there and do our best. We're contributing to the story. If it weren't for the colorists the books would all be black and white, and you'd let the kids color them in."

THE AVENGERS inker Tom Palmer shares Sharen's pride in being a colorist, having been an early crusader for the recognition colorists enjoy today. "Neal Adams and I worked on some original X-MEN and AVENGERS. They didn't give coloring credits then, but Neal would do an issue, and I would do an issue, and we both felt very strongly about the coloring, how important it was to the book." But while Palmer, an art school graduate with an illustration background, shares Sharen's regard for their craft, he disagrees that a colorist should be required to have formal training. "He has no art background," he said of colleague Greg Wright, "and he is a terrific colorist. We were talking about color, and I asked him a question about using complementary color when he wants to subdue something, and he didn't know what I was talking about. So he is ignorant of color theory, but he is a terrific colorist. What I'm trying to say is that you don't need an art school color background or color theory in order to color a comic book. Once you learn the mechanics of it, and you've got a guide in front of you, and you've got to stay within that guide. I think that's the rules of the game. You've got to stay within the parameters, but what color you put down is your own personal taste."

Palmer enjoys his run on THE AVENGERS, adding, "I'm really on with some great people." He credits writer Bob Harras for the series renewed success. "Bob Harras has got something in the back of his mind where he wants to lead the book, and every issue seems to be going in that direction. Everyone that I've spoken to has come up to me and said, 'gee, I can't wait for the next issue, I can't wait to read it.'" Palmer admits to being a big Avengers fan himself. "Here I've been working on the books for weeks, and I'm even saying, "What are they doing? I'm hanging, I'm waiting! There's a cliffhanger at the end, so by that time I'm so excited, then I've gotten some ideas of what I want to do, and maybe I'll grab a chunk from the book and color that first, because I think that's the most exciting part of the book, and I'll put a lot of color in that area."

Palmer finds AVENGERS artist Steve Epting's pencils motivational, and commented, "I think Bob is inspired by the artwork, also." When asked who produces the pencils easiest to color, Palmer said, "The easiest guy, the guy you can't screw up, is Joe Kubert. Anybody can color Joe and make it look good. And if you color, you'll understand."

AVENGERS WEST COAST letterer Steve Dutro also has good words for Joe Kubert, having graduated from the Joe Kubert School, which is where, he said, "just about every Marvel staff letterer went." When asked why he chose a career in lettering, as opposed to the one of the other, more glorified disciplines, Dutro answered, "Right now, I'm making ten times as much money as my friends who are penciling."

Dutro began his career at Marvel as a staff letterer, picking up freelance work to do in the evenings. "I got about four hours sleep [each night] for a year and a half before I got enough freelance work not to have to go in [to the office]."

The letterer then left New York to return to his hometown of Red Bluff, California, where he continues to work steadily, with the help of a fax machine and Federal Express. "I get up at seven and start working from there," he said. "I don't have to get dressed if I don't want to."

Aside from the freedom to make his own hours and never have to leave his house, Dutro explained another boon to his career, working on AVENGERS WEST COAST. "I enjoy working with it because the penciler has a good sense of draftsmanship. When you're working with something that seems uninspired, you just want to be done with it." He added that, for obvious reasons, "copy heavy scripts are not popular with letterers."

Dutro mentioned another favorite job, a departure from the action and fisticuffs of most of his projects. "I like working on BARBIE. It's a refreshing change, believe me," he laughed. "They have some people working on that book who are doing a really nice job. I give copies of BARBIE to my friends. They love it!"

In recent years, several publishers have started to use computerized lettering in the production of comic books, and Dutro offered his opinion of this emerging trend. "[It] scares the hell out of me. Lettering should be done by hand the way God intended it to be. You can do so many creative things by hand with lettering that a computer can't do." His tone lightening somewhat, Dutro said, "Some companies are starting to use them, and I'm going to have to write some stern letters."

For those who would dismiss his contribution to the industry, Dutro said that lettering is "a major part of the look of the comic. Half of what you're looking at is what the letterer did, so it's a big part of the artwork." He added, "I thought people didn't pay attention to lettering, but they do. People in comic stores will recognize you and ask you for your autograph. It's really weird."

It's not that weird. Seasoned comic aficionados realize that it takes more than great writers and artists to produce the "good art, good story" that keeps them coming back for more. It requires the finishing touches of a good colorist and letterer, which are integral in transforming a good story into a great comic book.

A FOE WORTHY...

Your heart races as you turn to the last page. . . . This is it! The villain who has been behind The Avengers's latest woes is about to be revealed! Of course. It's none other than their ultimate arch-foe — Kang!

No wait, that's not right . . .It's their arch-nemesis — Ultron!

Hold on. . .The plot has been hatched by their all-time greatest antagonists — The Masters of Evil!

"WHY WOULD ANYONE GO LOOKING FOR THAT KIND

A difficult task, this one, trying to decide just who is The Avengers's ultimate arch-foe. There really are so many contenders for that title. It's much easier to identify The Fantastic Four's greatest nemesis — Doctor Doom. And the X-Men? Everyone knows it's Magneto. But the Avengers? They've had so many deadly enemies, but to crown one as their arch-foe? That's nearly impossible. The obvious question then is, why? Why is it so hard to put the proverbial finger on who is the arch-foe of the Earth's Mightiest Heroes?

The easy — and most flattering — answer is to say that The Avengers don't have one arch-foe, they have several. However, that tack really just side-steps the issue. To be certain, whenever they face the likes of Kang or Ultron or Grim Reaper the battle is a monumental one. But to call any of these evil-doers The Avengers's "arch-foe," well that may just cause one heck of a battle among the villains themselves as they try eliminate their competition.

The hard-to-swallow answer is closer to the truth: The Avengers's don't have an arch-foe at all. Does this mean that their enemies are not the cream of evil's crop? Does it mean that the writers who have crafted so many great Avengers's tales over the years have failed in their craft?

No, no, and no. "Sure, The Avengers don't have a single villain as intimately tied to them as, say, Doctor Doom is to the FF," stated Marvel Executive Editor and occasional AVENGERS scribe Mark Gruenwald. "Certainly they've had a number of contenders for that title from time to time, but no one villain that every reader instantly recognizes as their arch-foe. Have the writers and editors failed in their task? No. But writers do have different artistic tendencies and they often desire to develop different things other than ultimate villains."

Current AVENGERS Editor Ralph Macchio also realizes that The Avengers are without one ultimate nemesis. "One of the main reasons for this," Ralph observed, "is that the team membership is fluid; it changes very often over time. Whenever a new membership lineup is introduced, all the way back to the beginning of the title, the team fights a series of villains with very little repeat of foes for the same team makeup. Then, before you know it, the lineup changes in some significant way and the team/nemesis relationship changes, too."

Ralph took his analysis even further, going so far as to point out that sometimes the constant use of an arch-villain can dilute the quality of a title. "Not having an arch-foe is not necessarily a weakness or disadvantage. Having to constantly come up with a reason for conflict — or, more precisely, a new twist to the conflict, battle, and resolution — can become tiring for the creators. It also runs the risk of coming across as forced."

Longtime AVENGERS writer Roy Thomas agreed with Ralph. "Perhaps the most fitting reason the Avengers are without an arch-foe is that it is such an eclectic group. The membership changes and thus does the group dynamics. It's hard to be an enemy of 'the group' when different heroes are in the lineup. Motives get cloudy and the conflict becomes repetitive."

But don't The Fantastic Four and The X-Men have the same inherent problems? Both teams have undergone both writer and membership changes. Why then do they have arch-foes while The Avengers do not? Well, for one, each subsequent creative team that has handled those groups has seen fit to stay with at least the same core members, and a similar driving philosophy as followed by the writers and editors before them. Lineups and approaches may have changed, but not on par with The Avengers.

Fine. So The Avengers's membership changes drastically and creators come and go, but still no arch-foe? This is still a little hard to swallow. Perhaps if we examine what makes a super-villain into an arch-foe. Then we might better see why this collection of great heroes, regardless of team dynamics or writer desire, is without a clear-cut winner in the arch-foe sweepstakes. And what better way to do this than by looking at Marvel's two most prominent arch-foes, Doctor Doom and Magneto.

". . .an arch foe must have the power with which to back up his villainy."

"Doom and Magneto both have something in their back stories, personal makeup, and goals that make them an integral part of their counterpart's history," Gruenwald explained. "Doom, with his personal ties to Reed Richards

makes you instantly say that he is the *one* arch-foe of the FF. The same is the case for Magneto, who is opposed to how Professor Xavier deals with the mutant problem. No matter who else these two villains may fight, for whatever reason, they really want to see the demise of either the FF or the X-Men. Plus, let's face it, though they have failed in the past, no one doubts that either villain has the power to get the job done."

Gruenwald pointed out three important factors that go into making a villain a particular hero's arch-foe.

OF ABUSE?"

First, there must be a credible reason why that villain hates that particular hero or group so vehemently. Does the group stand philosophically opposed to what the villain hopes to accomplish, beyond the standard reason of good thwarting evil at every turn? Magneto sees the X-Men as a panacea to the mutant situation; he feels that mutant-kind should rule the human race, while Xavier's dream is a world where mutants and normal humans live together in peace. Doom, on the other hand, blames the meddlesome Fantastic Four for all of his foiled political ambitions and personal problems, especially his physical disfigurement.

Second, the villain must have some sort of personal tie to the team or hero that raises the heat of their conflict to a personal level. Magneto and the X-Men are both mutants, hated by many for being different. Doom and Reed Richards are intellectual rivals, and Doom is more than a bit jealous of the family that the FF has formed even as he has no one in his own life.

Finally, an arch-foe must have the power with which to back up his villainy. Surely, no one will deny that Magneto and Doom are physically capable of wiping out their enemies, even if they have not been successful in doing so.

With the above definition in mind, it seems hard to swallow that one of the many Avenger villains can't be proclaimed their one true arch-foe. However, closer scrutiny of the main contenders for that crown will indeed show that to be the case.

Kang the Conqueror/Immortus: "Perhaps the closest thing to an ultimate foe the teams has is Kang," Ralph Macchio stated . "At least from the stand-point of how often he returns to battle them and how deeply the conflict runs."

The time hopping Kang has often travelled from the 41st Century to the present in his attempt to conquer time itself, only to have his plans thwarted by The Avengers. Now, surely, anyone who can manipulate time has the power enough to be considered a team's arch-foe? Well, that's part of the problem — Kang's goal is to conquer, and The Avengers, along with The Fantastic Four, are merely opposed to his plans. He has no real *personal* tie to The Avengers per se.

"The fact that Kang claims to be related to Reed Richards, coupled with the number of times he's been in conflict with the FF, sort of keeps him from being The Avengers's arch-foe," Roy Thomas reasoned . "His history — or is that his future?Qkeeps him from the title as the ultimate foe."

The Masters of Evil: Perhaps a group whose membership often changes needs a super-villain group with a fluid lineup to qualify their arch-foe. If that is the case, then the Masters of Evil might fit the bill. Regardless of their membership — whether the roll call included the Wrecking Crew, Absorbing Man, and/or The Grey Gargoyle — The Masters of Evil had the power to take on The Avengers. However, their claim to primacy ends there, especially given that their changing lineup also precludes them from having personal ties to The Avengers. Plus, pointed out current **AVENGERS** writer Bob Harras, their motives are not that strong. "The Masters of Evil was this group of villains who would get together and attack the Avengers for no apparent reason. Why would anyone go looking for that kind of abuse? They just didn't have a purpose."

Grim Reaper: The Grim Reaper, the undead, self-styled harbinger of life in decay, comes very close to being the Avengers's arch-foe. He has an intimate tie to both Simon

Willaims (his brother) and the Vision, and his death at the Avengers's hands certainly constitutes solid motivation to seek their destruction (especially when you couple this with the fact that he needs to literally absorb the life-force of living beings to survive). However, as Mark Gruenwald pointed out, "Sure, the Grim Reaper has sufficient motive and concrete ties to the team, but he just doesn't have the power to take them all on."

Ultron: Ultron, the all-adamantium sentient robot, appears to be the closest thing The Avengers have to an arch-nemesis, at least by the accepted definition of the term. He is certainly powerful enough to threaten the group, he has many personal ties to the team (Hank Pym is his creator, and Ultron did create the Vision), and he desires more than to just battle The Avengers for the sake of conflict. "Ultron has a lot of potential to be the teams's arch-foe," pointed out Thomas, the villain's creator. "In fact, recently we've seen his motives expand from mere vengeance to wanting to eradicate all organic life on this planet. Ultron goes a long way to showing that a longtime villain can be developed into a formidable opponent, if not arch-villain. It is possible to choose the right villain and transform him into an arch-foe; many writers don't create villain "X" to be the ultimate challenge for a hero. In the case of Ultron, he was just a robot. Now, he's becoming more."

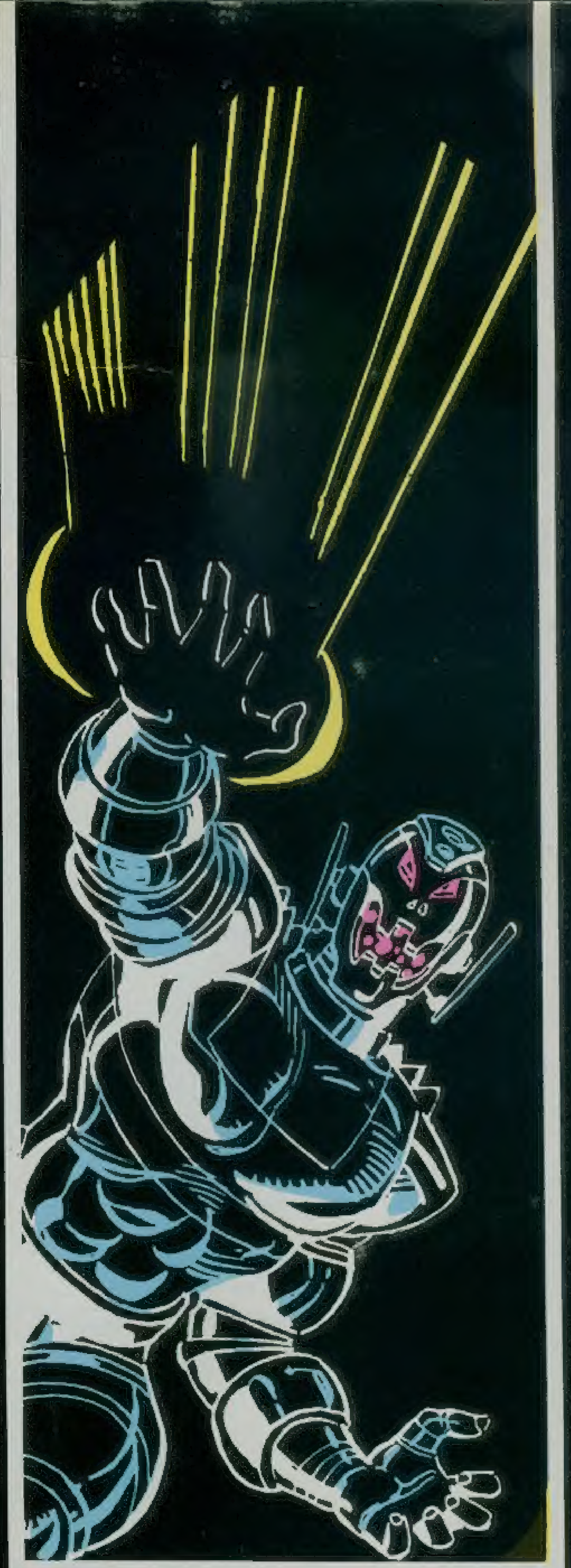
With all of the bases covered, why, then, are readers reluctant to declare Ultron the Avengers's arch-foe? Well, for all of the creative things current writers have done with him, he's "still just a robot," as stated by Thomas and Gruenwald. "Ultron is definitely powerful enough to take on all of the Avengers," Gruenwald added. "But even with his personal connection to the team, he's a mechanical construct and just can't seem to get past the two-dimensionality of this fact."

So, now that it has been established that The Avengers are without an arch-foe, writer Bob Harras has undertaken the task of changing this fact forever. By creating the mysterious Proctor, with his intimate tie to Sersi (and, through as series of plot twists, The Black Knight), and his group of powerful Gatherers, Harras has given birth to what many around the halls of Marvel consider the ultimate nemesis that The Avengers need.

Many readers will recall the genesis of this band of "alternate" Avengers. By exploiting the powers of an injured Watcher, the Proctor gathered a group of beings from various alternate realities. The members of the group all have two things in common: each one is a slightly distorted version of an Avenger and each one has a deeply personal reason for seeking the Avengers' destruction. Thus, driven by a collective thirst for vengeance (as well as the Proctor's constant telepathic manipulation), the Gatherers were born.

"With the Gatherers, I've created a team of villains that has a reason to attack the Avengers," Harras said. "They aren't a mirror image of the Avengers, but their agenda is solely concentrated on the team."

Power base and personal ties — now all that's missing is credible motivation, especially if Sersi leaves the team. Well, as has been established in recent issues of the book, Proctor and his Gatherers appear to be enemies of the Avengers in every dimension of the multiverse, and though the full extent of their plans remain to be seen, you can bet that these villains' reason for being is much more than mere conflict and plunder. As admiringly pointed out by Ralph Macchio, "Bob Harras has put his finger on what could be the Avengers's Magneto."



Jerry Novick, a veteran of the promotional and editorial sides of the comics indusatry, is a regular contributor to MARVEL AGE via "The Hot Sheet." His other Marvel credits include MARVEL PREVIEW '93, X-MEN ANNIVERSARY MAGAZINE and the X-Men trading cards.

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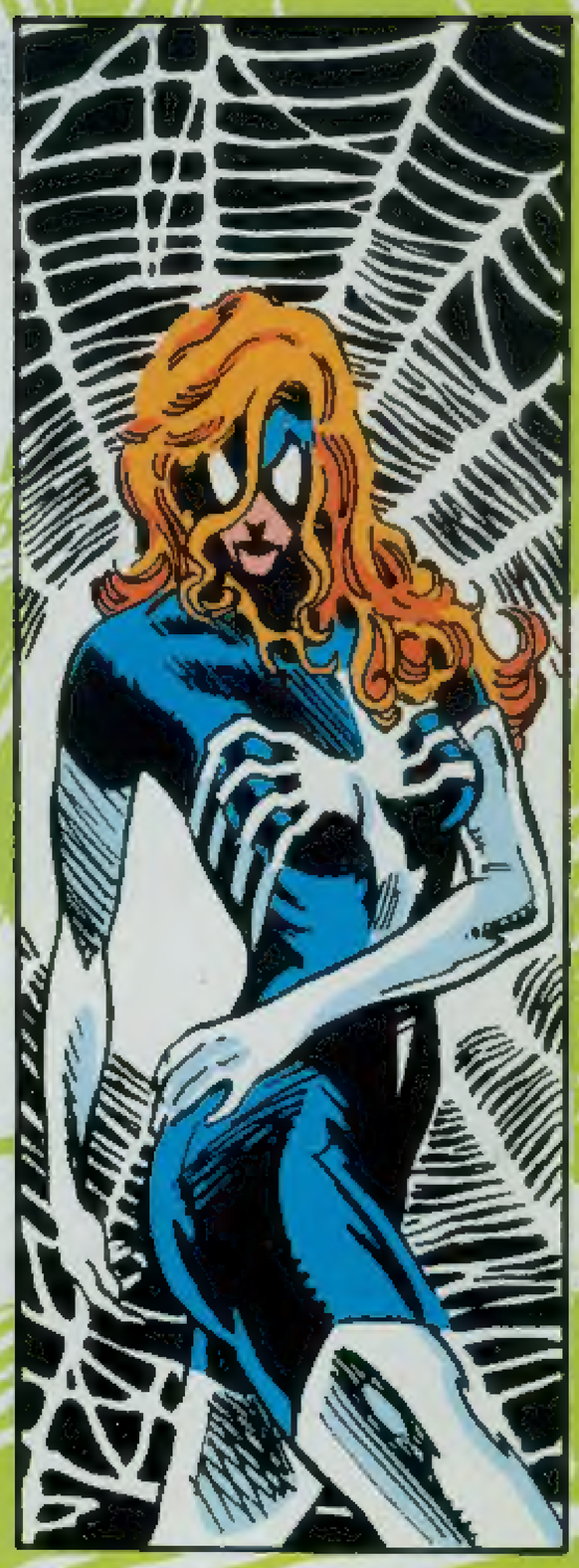

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